Chapter 5

THE AGE OF KALI

INDIAN TRAVEL & ENCOUNTERS
In the introduction William Dalrymple announces The Age of Kali is “a collection of peripatetic essays, a distillation of ten year’s travel around the Indian subcontinent.” These essays and encounters have been, as he himself states at the very outset, conceived during working on his second book ‘City of Djinns’. Being a traveller, journalist and Historian the varied and eerie things about this part of the globe attracts him. And the outcome of his toil on the socio-political conditions of these Asian nations is –this collection of essays.

The title of the book bears the reference to the Hindu mythological reference of labelling of the four different epochs of time. In the introduction- Dalrymple tells the tale of his selection of the title. Explaining his point he notes:

The book’s title is a reference to the concept in ancient Hindu cosmology that time is divided into four great epochs. Each age (or yug) is named after one of the four throws, from best to worst, in a traditional Indian game of dice; accordingly, each successive age represents a period of increasing moral and social deterioration. The ancient mythological Golden Age, named after the highest throw of dice, is known as the Krita Yug, or the age of Perfection. As I was told again and again on my travels around the subcontinent, India is now in throes of the Kali yug, the Age of Kali, the lowest possible throw, an epoch of strife, corruption, darkness and disintegration. (Dalrymple Age xi)

To support his point, and to strengthen the grounds for his focus and snap-shooting the violent and degraded landscape of all the stories he has included in this collection, he makes a point to site from the seventeenth century Vishnu Purana:

The kings of Kali yug will be addicted to corruption and will seize the property of their subjects, but will, for the most part, be of limited power, rising and falling rapidly. The property and wealth alone will confer rank; falsehood will be the only means of success in litigation. Corruption will be the universal means of subsistence. At the end, unable to support their avarious kings, the people of Kali Age will take refuge in the chasms between mountains, they will wear rugged garments, and they will have too many
children. Thus in the Kali Age shall strife and decay constantly proceed, until the human race approaches annihilation. (Dalrymple *Age* xii)

On witnessing the bloodshed violence spread throughout the subcontinent, he states, he feels convinced that *the Age of Kali* has in reality cuffed the human race here, and made them thirsty of each other’s blood—no matter whatever is the ground. Be it social, political or the religious, or on the grounds of morality, status or family feuds, the human race seems on the dagger drawing stance. Tolerance and broad-mindedness are no longer in the index of human virtues, rather they are considered to be the attributes of weakness in the social arena. Man finds himself entangled with his own fellow people and he feels he has to struggle hard to get what, he thinks, is essential for his well-being and happiness. The weakest points of Democracy have got surfaced and the reins of power have been grabbed by the persons with criminal backgrounds.....

The blind race of these South-Asian nations for military power, and their accumulation of ‘Nuclear’ weapons, he notes, as the confirming step towards the Puranic prophecy of the end of this ‘*Kali Yug*’ in the total devastation by the thousands of blazing suns.

As he asserts, if he has five lives, all of them he would like to spend in India—that is, he is that much in love with this nation. His travels across this nation has brought him to the close quarters of the varied and variety of life-styles, beliefs, conventions and sometimes oddities of the lives of the people and perhaps owing to this throughout a concern that rings in his mind is: “Whether the prosperity of the south and west of the country can outweigh the disorder and decay which is spreading out from Bihar and the north” (Dalrymple *Age* xiii).

He knows his selection of the issues is sensitive which might raise a few cries of protest and notes of dissent from the citizens of India. He might be held to the critique as how far he has got the right to criticize the land on which he has travelled for a few years and does not have the enough knowledge of the overall perspectives of this ancient culture. But he makes it clear at the very outset that all his labour, research and attachments have been bred out of his tender affections and love for this land. And true — many commentators and reviewers have not taken this book with a well-come note. The critics and commentators blame William on the grounds that in an attempt to prove his title appropriate, Dalrymple concentrates a bit too much on the negative side of the story and fails to predict the good things, India would experience in the coming years.
But what captures Dalrymple’s attention are the grounds gravely fixed on the stark reality of commonplace life. He describes how caste, crime, money and muscle power have a stranglehold on rural north Indian society, particularly Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan where women are raped, and caste based militias kill each other with impunity. The agencies of administration and police are often in collusion with the criminals. He also tries to understand the leagues of the convicted murderers to win the elections, the student unions’ fascination for the power game of politics for that their use of guns and grenades when actually books and journals should be their concerns. On the whole, it is all about what William comes across during his travels across the Indian subcontinent. Some places he visits, particularly the camps of Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and the borders of Pakistan, demand great cautions and hold a bit of personal risk too. For these are the places where fatal- deadly weapons trade free and even the local outsider is not easily well-come within their staunch secretive circles and is looked at with sheer suspicion, and the slightest blur of untrustworthiness from such an outsider might be justified with a shot of a gun.

William has picked up those issues which created sensational tremors among the socio-political circles of contemporary India in the last decade of 20th century. As a developing nation, India has to tackle many such clashes, even the neighbouring nations Pakistan and Srilanka too are undergoing same transitional phase. Some of the articles in this collection have been new versions of previously published ‘Journalistic’ articles. And as the author confesses, “some of them have been, edited, trimmed and re-written... and some have been suffixed with a new post scripts to bring them up to date” (xv). The collection consists of six titles and each title presents two to four different articles pertaining to that particular area of subject.

The first four cover the Indian milieu. ‘The North’ presents the scenario of northern India, particularly the essay ‘The Age of Kali’ talks of the political feudalism of the state of Bihar. ‘In the Kingdom of Avadh’ looks back into the glorious past of this Nawabi Kingdom; and presents the concerns of the persons associated with it. ‘The City of Widows’ captures and echoes the pains and untold sufferings of the widows spending their lives helplessly in the city of Vrindavan. The widows here are paid meagre wages for enchanting the name of God in shifts in the round the clock prayers!!!! And rest of their needs are satisfied through begging on the streets of this place of pilgrimage. ‘The Warrior Queen’ presents the story of the queen of Gwalior, and provides the details of her political and personal life. The last one ‘East of Evans’ once again pays attention towards the public temperament resorting to violence even for the ordinary offences received from the fellow beings. ‘The North’, thus snapshots
such situational scenario of the northern part of India that on the whole gives one an impression that the Northern part of India is standing on the mouth of a volcano which constantly emits the blazing flames of violence.

The second title ‘In Rajasthan’ presents three articles. ‘The Sad Tale of Bahveri’ presents the painful case of Bahveridevi. She was raped by the socially and politically privileged person and his men of her own village only at the fault of her that they doubted she provided information to the government machinery about the child-marriage in the said man’s family. Not only was she raped in her farm in front of her husband, but was boycotted by the whole village on the grounds that she was a ‘prostitute’ herself and by lodging complaint against village’s reputed people on the allegation of rape, she had brought shame on their village. ‘Caste Wars’ presents another grave picture of society of Rajasthan. It documents that even at the end of the twentieth century/turn of twenty first century – still the society is segregated on the grounds of caste in some regions of Rajasthan.’ ‘Sati Mata’ looks into the debated case of ‘Sati’ at Deorala village near Jaipur. Here, the ancient Hindu practice of ‘Sati’- i.e. ritually burning the widow of the dead person to death in the cremation pyre was attempted to be revived. He sincerely tries to investigate whether the issue involved the voluntary selection of the lady to embrace death through the ancient tradition or was it the case of honour killing in which the lady was compelled against her will to die in the name of tradition?

In the third group of essays titled ‘The New India’, William Dalrymple brings under the focus the modern social strides of the elite class of the metro cities of India which shows the direct impacts of the westernized culture. In ‘Two Bombay Portraits’ he presents the word paintings of two icons of modern India namely Baba Sehgal, the world’s first Hindi rap megastar and Shobha Dè, the lady English writer who has started a sort of writing which has been drastically labelled “dirty and filthy” in the staunch Indian circles. He notes that the flow of cash through the liberal economic policies has given birth to a new elite class in the Indian society, especially in the metropolitan complexes of India like Delhi and Mumbai. And under the waves of the western influences getting filtered through the world markets, the youth has adopted new age addiction to the party lives. As a result of this, a new wave of bars and discotheques have got booming and mushrooming in the cities like Bombay. Shobha Dè presents in her creative arena the tantalising details of the lives of the multimillionaires and the scandals that their wealth gives them legacy and privilege to enjoy. This kind of writings, though not welcome openly by any elite literary levels, and adversely criticised for the stinking ‘cheapness’—finds its way among the people
and sells boominly. This as Shobha herself claims, “I write readable trash commercial novels. But I don’t think “commercial” is a dirty word....There is a market out there, and I’m filling the slot.” “Finger-Lickin’Bad: Bangalore and Fast-food Invaders” presents the story of the changing food habits and the agitations bred out of this change among the certain social circles and manifestation and outburst of such underlying and suppressed oppose into the destructive attacks on the multi-national Fast-Food stores and the protest against the “Miss World Contest” in the Indian Cyber city Bangalore. The social circles appear broadly forked on the issue. On one hand there are the conventionalists who protest such events taking shape in the name of dragging the nation once again back to the points of “Cultural Imperialism”, whereas there are the groups who claim it to be the stepping stone through which India could secure a true cosmopolitan status, and they on their part ridicule those who oppose this as being “insecure lot who cannot face the world.”

The fourth title ‘The South’ consists of three essays reflecting the way of life and the faith holding agencies of the South Indian people. ‘At the Court of the Fish-Eyed Goddess’ is set in the southern Tamil temple town of Madurai. William here notes that Madurai was from the time of 4th century an important trade centre on the Spice Route. The city’s time phase has witnessed many scores of popularity of Religious significance, but now with rising of the middle class there is a great influx of believers in the temple of Goddess. “Under the Charminar” is once again Dalrymple’s choice of historical exploration. Here in this essay he revokes through the memmories of Mir Moazam Husain the glorious past of this Hydrabad State. William holds this glorious past as the foil to present the constant degradation of this state, just in the same tune of the Age of Kali. He also brings in the ‘Police Action’ – the painful chapter of Indian Post-Independence History. And ends it in the same mood as the destruction and devastations of the grandeur of Past has reached its apex. The next essay “Parashakti” enacts the story of the Goddess Parashakti in the city of Cochin of Keral State. What interests him here the most is the practise of relieving the “possessed” from the clutch of the eerie spirits through the invocation of the goddess.

The fifth title, “On the Indian Ocean”, presents three essays on the three different islands on the face of the great Indian Ocean. The first of them “At Donna Georgina’s” presents the story of Goa. Donna Georgina, the host of William at Goa and the ......., reveals the facts before the author-- the goans and their culture found their ecstasies, or at the most were happy under the reign of the Portuguese colonials, and also that the forceful seizer of Goa by India in 1961was the worst fate of it. She claims to William that majority of Goan public feeling was against that but as they
were less in number and feeble in force, they had to yield to “them”, i.e. Indians. “Up the Tiger Path” fine research of the author on the most mysterious\secretive operations of the Tamil Tigers—the militant force waging a civil war on the Srilankan land in the name of the regions densely inhabited by the Indian Tamils in 1990. William visits their training camps and interviews their leader too their leader too.

“The Sorcerer’s Grave” relates the travel of the author to the mountainous Indian Ocean Island, known today as Réunion. He also weaves the mythical story of hidden treasure on this Island. Though the Island lies on the heart of the Indian Ocean, half way between Madagascar and Srilanka, William notes, it is a place of heterogeneous\assorted cultures and is still the part of France. He also visits the grave of Levasseur, and there he comes to know that while other graves in the centenary remained uncared the one that of La Buse was clearly much-visited and worshipped for favours people desired to have.

The sixth title “Pakistan” contains three essays on our neighbouring nation Pakistan. The first among them “Imaran Khan: Out for as Duck” presents William’s travel and close study of the corrupt mechanism of political machineries in Pakistan. Imaran Khan, the most popular captain of the Pakistani cricket team, opts to revolutionise the whole corrupt political system in Pakistan and with this noble end in mind contests the national elections under the banner of a new political party he himself founded- ‘Tehrik-e-Insaf’. William minutely covers his whole political campaign and reports the unprecedented welcome Imaran Khan received from the people of Pakistan. But, the results of the elections are adverse to all the surveys and opinion polls which forecast\speculated the victory of Imaran Khan and his party. On the contrary there was a clean swipe of Tehrik-e-Insaf and neither Imaran nor any of his nominees win a single seat in the election. “On the Frontier” again presents the weakening conditions of law and order in Pakistan and the free trade and easy access to the deadly and fatal weapons in the frontier regions of Pakistan. “Blood on the Tracks” is the presentation of the partition tragedy from the other side of the Indian Frontiers. It is Dalrymple’s research on the architectural magnificence of the Lahore Railway Station, but how can he miss an opportunity to draw the attention of the world to the facts that the same building had been an eminent witness to the partition tragedy? “Benazir Bhutto: Mills & Boons in Karachi” once again is a word sketch of a Pakistani Political tycoon Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of late president of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was hanged to death by the government of General zia.
All these essays are the result of William’s sincere research and personal rectifications of evidences. His travels bring him face to face with the degrading trends in all walks of life in the places he visits, or sometimes his interest drags him to such places. Though there are adverse comments as William has picked up and has chosen to present only the dark sides of developing India and sometimes exaggerates the social or political reporting in order to prove his title appropriate, one cannot deny the truthfulness and reality of his observations on social and political developments taking place in India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

The Age of Kali

The Age of Kali presents the violence-striken situation of the state of Bihar. The news published in Indian Express of 13 February 1992, about the massacre of the upper caste people of Barra village by some 200 armed untouchables arrests his attention. Such news has become so commonplace one that even though a number of persons have been reported to have been reported to be butchered mercilessly, it has been “buried somewhere in the middle pages” of the newspaper, and carries no waitage of being the Headline. More surprising matter, as it seems to William, is the cold commonplace response of other Indians to it. Such a wild play of violence goes taken for granted in case of Bihar, as this state “where Buddha attained his enlightenment”, is more well-known for such outbursts of violence, creeping corruptions and endemic caste-warfare. The weaker points of Democracy are at their peak as the sphere of Politics-election- all this has become the dirty power games; especially in Bihar. The criminals and the persons with legal liabilities get elected and at the time of elections unfair means, Booth-capturing, etc. keep their course and results of this, as William presents, “no fewer than thirty three of Bihar’s State Assembly MLAs had criminal records, and a figure like Dular Chand Yadav, who had a hundred cases of Decoity and fifty murders cases pending against him, could also be addressed as Honourable Member for Barh.

Media catches crystal clear reflections of society, and the news from Bihar teem with the stories of crimes and breaches of laws. Here the Minister and his supporters illigally capture Railway compartment crushing every voice of protest and with the boasting claim of being the creator of the law gave them the unsaid privilege of brecking them too. Another news of the civil servant G. Krishnaiah’s
merciless murder by the local MP Anand Mohan Singh who “exhorted his followers to lynch the upstart official.” The Minister -- the representative of public—caters criminal gangs and uses them to demonstrate his power—this is the most grave face of democracy. And what is more alarming to the temperament and well being of democracy—is Anand Mohan’s contesting the general election 1996 and retaining his seat of MP inspite of being in the jail.

Dalrymple, naturally being wondered at such scenario being reported in the news, decides to have the first hand information on the issue of massacre of Barra village. He finds out Ashok Singh, one of the two fellows who escaped death in the massacre and visits the ‘site’ of massacre at Barra. The description of the event is breath taking. On that fateful night all the male members of this ‘Bhumihar’ families were taken to one clearing in the farm and murdered one by one. As Ashok narrates all the murders were executed by two persons, so the other victims had to wait and watch the barbarious play of butchering of their own kiths and kins. He saw with his own eyes his father, brothers and cousins being treated with the edge of a sickle:

They killed all my brothers. They killed my father and they killed my uncle and cousins. Eventually my turn came. One of the men pushed me forward and the other got his sickle and took three swipes. It made deep cuts on the back of my neck and head. I was senseless. The next thing i knew i woke up in hospital in Gaya.; it was three weeks before i could get out of bed. (08)

Even after this nightmare, back at the village the ladies and the male members who survived the mishap live under terrified circumstances and constant threat of being attacked. The new houses they built remind William some miniature castle or “the Peel towers erected across the Scottish boarders in the sixteenth century” (08).

Recurrence of such events at certain intervals at one or the other corner of Bihar makes one wonder with the notion that it is receding towards the DARK AGES. William rightly observes much of Bihar’s violence has roots in the caste feudalism:

There, two rival militia were at work: the Savarna Liberation Front, which represented the interests of the high-caste landowning Bhumihars, and the Maoist Communist Centre, which took the part lower castes and Untouchables who farmed the Bhumihars’ fields. Week after week, the Bhumihars would go ‘Harijan hunting’, setting off in convoys of jeeps to massacre ‘uppity Untouchables’, ‘to make an example’; in retaliation, the peasants would emerge from the fields at night and silently behead an oppressive landlord or two. The police did little to protest either group.
William drags attention to the point of Laloo Prasad Yadav’s in Bihar and Mulayam Singh Yadav’s in Uttar Pradesh—the lower caste politicians’ emergence on the political horizons as a stride of turning of tables. He notes that Indian politics has always been dominated by the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas—the two castes on the top of the caste pyramid. But, the social revolution, bred out of dissatisfaction towards the oppressions and atrocities of the upper castes, has taken the lead and now these lower caste political leaders are gaining power which they “use to ensure that their lot is bettered,” and as Laloo Yadav puts it in his talks with William:

Because we were from the Yadav caste we were not entitled to sit on the chair, they (the upper caste people) made us sit on the ground. I remember all that humiliation. Now I am in chair and I want those people to sit on the ground. It is in my mind to teach them a lesson. (15)

William decides to meet Laloo Prasad Yadav, the chief minister of Bihar, the apostle of lower caste lead on the Indian political Horizons, and fortunately happens to find him on the same flight to Patna. This is how he describes his meeting and first impression he forms about him:

He finds in Laloo a perfect combination of personality who can adorn many facets for successful trade in Indian politics. He appears an ordinary gullible villager with his acute assent of Bihar language but when time demands he could easily take resort to unfair means, guns and violence. Laloo comes from a lower caste family and he had no privileged childhood. But he is fully confident about the social awakening of the lower castes of which he boasts to the representative: “The backward castes will rise up,” he said, “Even now they are waking up and raising their voices. You will see: we will break the power of these [upper caste] people....” (24).

And this sort of awakening will result in his own political empowerment as he asserts:

The BJP [Bharatiya Janta Party] and the Congress are both Brahminical Parties. The Backward castes have no reason to vote for them. Already they have realised this in Bihar. In time they will realise this everywhere. The support of these parties will dry up like a dirty puddle in summer. (24)

He seems totally indifferent to the total failure of administration in Bihar state: ..... the economy is stagnant, crime is completely out of control: 64,085 violent offences (such as armed robbery, looting, rioting and murder) took place between January and June 1997. This figure includes 2625 murders 1116 kidnapping and 127 abduction for ransom, meaning that Bihar witnesses 14
murders everyday and a kidnapping every four hour. Whatever index of prosperity and development you choose, Bihar comes triumphantly at the bottom. It has the lowest literacy, the highest crime, the fewest cinemas. Its per capita income is less than half the Indian average. Not long ago it had a major famine. The state has withered; Bihar is now nearing a situation of anarchy. (17)

The other examples of mal-administration, Dalrymple picks up/ finds out in his visit to the vice-chancellor, Prof. Mohinuddin and Mr. Uttam Sen Gupta, the editor of Patna edition of the Times Of India—are the students’ attack of the Vice – Chancellor as they were stopped from malpracticing in the exam, the broken down X-Ray machine for a year in the Patna civil Hospital and the Capital City of Bihar _patna going dark after the sunset as there were no light-bulbs in the streetslamps. William puts it in his unique style: “.......everyday at sunset, Patna a city of over a million people, was plunged into medieval darkness” (19).

And,

In a very real sense, Bihar may be a kind of Heart of Darkness pumping violence and corruption, pulse after pulse, out into the rest of the sub-continent. The first ballot-rigging recorded in India took place in Bihar in 1962 general election. Thirty year later, it is common across the country. The first example of major crimimals winning parliamentary seats took place in Bihar in 1980 election. Again, it is now quite normal all over India. (20)

Here—’corruption, lawlessness, marauding caste armies and the background of government’ does prevail and make the average citizen sighs (as it is expressed by Ashok Singh, the victim of the Barr tragedy): “We are left at the mercy of God. This is the Kali Yug (the Age of Kali), the epoch of disintegration” (21).

In the ‘Postscript’ to the essay, William wonders at the miraculous results of 1998 general election in which, despite his arrest under the fodder scam Laloo won his seat—his wife’s government returned to power in alliance with the Congress, and —robbery—crime, rage still gaining speed.

[Note: on 3rd of October 2013 Laloo was sentenced five years of confinement by the CBI court and on legal ground got disqualified from holding the membership of Parliament.]
In the Kingdom of Avadh

Lucknow-1998

Lucknow—the capital city of Avadh in her pre-colonial period especially its spectacular skyline—with its domes and towers and gilded cupolas, its palaces and pleasure gardens, ceremonial avenues and wide maidans—reminded the travellers [from West] of Constantinople, Paris or even Venice. Avadh [or Oudh] was also renowned for etiquette and refinement. In the realm of ‘Flamboyant Nawabs, during the eighteenth century, the city resembled ‘an Indian version of [pre-Revolutionary] Tehran, Monte Carlo and Las Vegas, with just a touch of Glyndebourne for good measure.’ But the Golden era came to a jostled end at the 1857 mutiny. The vengeful Britishers did all to reduce the glory of the city to near devastation stature. See, how the glories of this grand city get reflected in the words of a western traveller, as quoted by William:

Not Rome, not Athens, not Constantinople, not any city I have ever seen appears to me so striking and beautiful as this. The sun playing on the gilt domes and spires, the exceeding richness of the vegetation and forests and gardens remind one somewhat of the view of the Bois de Boulogne from the hill over St Cloud...but for the thunder of the guns and the noise of the balls cleaving the air, how peaceful the scene would be! (31) (The British war correspondent William Russel in the middle of the Great Mutiny)

But the fateful event of the Great Mutiny brought upon the city a sort of hard-luck and its charms were ruthlessly butchered by the Armies of the East India Company. Still, the city maintained her development and regained her charms to be known ‘as one of the great cities of the Raj” even it managed to revert the pattern of devastation and destruction brought upon it on the event of Partition.
They have no privacy, no luxuries, no holidays. They simply pray until they keel over and die. There are eight thousand of them at present in the town, and every year their number is increasing. (51)

In ‘The City of Widows’, William devotes his time in studying such painful lives of the numberless widows spending their days and waiting for death in this pious city of pilgrimage, Vrindavan of Uttar Pradesh which according to the Indian scriptures is the birth place of the great Indian deity Lord Krishna. He opens his essay with a factual painting of the plight: “The eye of faith can often see much that is hidden from the vision of the non believer” (49). In the nation like India whose very core of life-style takes one or another religio-centric foundation, any attempts to throw light on the real plights must be counter attacked in the name of faith, but still the reality cannot be evaded on any measure. He presents two views of the city. In the first case he says in the view of a secular being, the city is a nothing more than a rundown. But the same complex finds divine touch in the view of a pilgrim; his wistful eyes behold elements of lord Krishna in each and every molecule of the city. William paints it from the view point of a devout pilgrim: “Devout Hindus believe that Krishna is still present in this temple town with its crumbling palaces and swarming ashrams, its open sewers and its stalls selling brightly coloured lithographs of the God Child” (49).

Reaching at the root levels William notes:
In traditional Hindu society a woman loses her status the moment her husband dies. She is forbidden to wear colours or jewellery or to eat meat. She is forbidden to remarry (at least if she is reasonably high cast; low-caste and Untouchable women can do what they want) and she is forbidden to own property. She may no longer be expected to commit ‘sati’ and throw herself on her husband’s funeral pyre, but in many traditional communities, particularly in the more remote villages, she is still expected to shave her head and live like an ascetic, sleeping on the ground, living only to fast and pray for her departed spouse. (50)

And in such scenario, the widows are literally thrown out of their households and societies and they are forced to lead a pitiable life of misery on the dirty streets and alleys of the pious city Vrindavan.
Every day widows from all over India arrive in Vrindavan. They come to seek the protection of Krishna, to chant mantras and to meditate on their own mortality. They live in great poverty. In return for four hours of chanting, the principal ashram will give a widow a cupful of rice and two rupees---about four pence. (50)

William traces the painful story of Kankalatha. She had been living here in Vrindavan for last forty years i.e. the major part of her life she has spent here chanting the name of god and begging!

Her days starts at four thirty after her offering service to her private idol of Krishna, she would go for chanting shift from six to ten and after that her time would spend in begging in order to meet her expenses; the major of it being the rent of the ‘air less’ room in which she nurses her age old mother. Despite all these pains, worries and uncertainty of life, William is wonderstruck to note the ladies’ unfathomable, love and faith on Lord.

“If Govinda doesn’t look after us who will?” said Kanaklatha.
“If I didn’t believe in him how could I stay alive?”

Pain, pain, and pain only drips form their utterances:
“It is all fate.” It was the mother speaking. “When we were young we never imagined this would be our end” (53).

As kankalatha puts; “We were a land owning family. Now we have to beg to survive. Even now I’m full of shame when I beg, thinking I’m from a good family. It is the same with all the widows. Our usefulness is past we are all reject. This is our karma” (53).

The blame doesn’t fix on any other agency than on their own karma and there isn’t the slightest tone of complaint for god either. He is held with the esteem of a guardian. “Only Govinda knows our pain and misery,” said her mother. “No one else could understand” (53).

Many of these widows have literally been thrown out of their houses by their own sons and in some cases on the grounds of ‘shame’ that might fall on their family as they beg in the streets; they are cut off of all sorts of contacts.

In such plight it is natural that a question might rise in their minds as the age old mother of Kanaklatha, at the age of 95, in ill and bedridden state raises; “We haven’t committed a crime. Why should we go through all this?” (54)

And the shocking and heart rendering height of the case is that the pain and misery of such life makes them feel to validate the system of sati; instead of dying every moment with acute humiliations of begging, pains and the feeling they are not
important to anybody on this earth. Their existing or not made no difference to anybody in the society.

William also meets her landlord, Pandit Krishna Gopal Shulka and receives some more alarming details regarding the widows in the city. Shukla informs him about the money laundering mechanics of the business houses as well as the black trade of the young widows for mistresses and the scandals of selling them to the whorehouses.

The research of the writer places the miserable plight of the widows in real light and shows how in the name of tradition the widowed women are deprived of their rights and left uncared and in vulnerable conditions. Perhaps the old woman who comes to up William in the end rightly says: “We all died the day our husbands died how can anyone describe our pains our hearts are on fire with sorrow. Now we just wait for the day when all this will end” (59).

And perhaps all this makes Kamala Ghosh a local women’s rights activist puts, as quoted by William, “If I were to sit under a tree and tell you the sadness of the widows of Vrindavan, the leaves that tree would fall like tears”(51).

**Warrior Queen: The Rajmata of Gwalior**

“At the age of seventy-nine she is still an enigma.”

This is the response of the author after following personally the persona and personality and personal and political activities of the Dowager Maharani of Gwalior, Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia. A strong and hard-liner Hindu political theory holder, Rajmata holds many important positions in Indian politics. After having got her own dynastical reign dissolved after the Indian Independence from the British rule in 1947, Rajmata entered into the active politics. The well known slit in her family has an interesting story. When Indira Gandhi, the Congress Prime Minister, imposed emergency in India in 1975, Rajmata was also arrested and sent to the Tihar jail. During this instead of standing by his mother her son, Madhavrao Scindia went into the league with the Congress Government and managed to flee to Nepal leaving his mother to her fate in the Jail. This had cast deep and serious dent in the mother’s psyche —“.....in the Emergency he left me inside that jail with the criminals and prostitutes. Imagine it: one of the inmates had twenty-four cases against her, including four murders. These were the companions he thought suitable for his mother” (67).
Though engaged in many social and political activities, Rajmata is the lady of great faith. She tries to attribute all the developments with the will of God. Her day begins with two hour long Puja to lord Krishna, and to the question how does she take her lord Krishna to be, she blushingly replies: “...it’s like two lovers: you can’t say to them, “Describe how you behave when you are together” (65).

The resident in which Rajmata resides is a massive Jai Vilas Palace built according to the status of the Maharaja. William, who has seen many gorgeous buildings of the world, too gets impressed by the beauty of this building:

Then I noticed that to one side of the palace, a few hundred yards away, lay another, even larger, edifice. Suddenly I realised that the vast building I had just toured was only a small, detached wing—a kind of garden cottage—tucked off to the side of the main bulk of the Jai Vilas Palace. This far larger palace was the home of Sardar’s enemy, the Maharaja. Like the building we were standing in, it was a late-nineteen-century construction built in an Italian baroque style: a kind of massive Milanese wedding cake air-dropped into the jungle of central India. (69)

Another two things that arrest William’s attention are the World’s second largest Chandelier and the Solid Silver model railway on the dining table. Noting the historical event associated with the whole palace complex and the two eccentricities namely the Chandelier and the model train, William states that it all came to shape on the ‘Ill-fated visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Gwalior in 1857.’ William also brings into the light the mishaps that occurred on the visit of the royal couple in his humorous vein. The train which was designed to impress the Prince stumbled into the Prince’s lap at the dining table and the magnificent marble bath-tub itself disappeared into the floor at the time of princess’ bath.

William also notes that the real reign of Maharaja in Gwalior was a sweet dream of the residents of the state. The people still remember those days when they were looked after by the Ruler in the spirits of guardianship. Here too, there is a common shared discontent for the present corrupt bureaucracy:

The Maharaja would himself go around the city, at night, incognito, and see how the things were being managed. He really did believe his subjects were his children. Now where you go there is corruption and extortion. (The Major said) (71)

And, as Vanmala said:
Today every babu in the civil services thinks he is a Maharaja, and tries to make difficulties for the common man. But in those days there was only just one King. The people of Gwalior had confidence that if they told their story he would listen and try to redress them. (71)

Such is the estimation of their Kings—the rulers in the minds of the people.

Equally grand was their life-style. In their time the Kings enjoyed regal luxuries and even after their death, the kings are treated as living entities and given the same treatment as if they were alive. In the places where their memorials are erected, their statues are extended the real regal treatment right from the morning awaking music to the softer bed for night. Everything is done on the exact time-table. This practise reminds William of the pyramids of Egypt: “Grave goods—everything the Maharani would need for the afterlife—lay scattered all around. I felt rather as if I had stumbled into a Pyramid twenty years after the death of Ramses II” (73).

After enjoying the warm hospitality of Rajmata and having spent some quality time with her, William wonders about the media reporting about this lady. He finds not a single trait of obscurity in her as it is being reported about her in the media by her detractors in the Indian press. Rather he finds her to be: “...endearing, there was absolutely nothing sinister about her” (73).

Through the link of Rajmata Scindia, William picks up, here, an opportunity to express his observations on the emerging strength of the hard-line Hindu political ideology in eminence through the Bhartiya Janta Party and its mentor institution RSS {Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sang} {Association of National Volunteers}. He puts forward his observations on the RSS as a fascist institution hatching, in vein, the dream of national integrity, strength and purity:

Like Phalange in Lebanon, the RSS was founded in direct imitation of 1930s European fascist movement; and like its models it still makes much of daily parading in khakhi drill. The RSS views this as an essential element in the creation of a corps of dedicated and disciplined paramilitary followers who, so the theory goes, will form the basis of a revival of some long-lost golden age of national strength and purity. (63)

William draws attention towards the founding principle of this association which, he quotes the early RSS leader, Madhav Gowalkar, holds the ideal as that of the Germans’ treatment to the Jews and that: “The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must learn... to revere the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving nothing” (63).
William notes that it was this RSS that took the lead of the most horrifying atrocities against the Indian Muslims during the Partition. He also asserts Nathu Ram Godsay’s, the assassinator of Mahatma Gandhi, RSS connection. In the course of time the BJP has moved away from the neo-fascist Hindu fundamentalism and assumed rather conservative nationalist opinion. Thus, on one hand the Congress has lost the trust of the minorities and on the other BJP is attracting the nationalists ---as a result of this it is getting momentum.

William has almost, as he asserts, forgotten the manuscripts on Rajmata, but the sudden, unexpected and fateful events of 6th December 1992, once again brought Rajmata on the Headlines of the press, and this reminded him of his study of Rajmata’s persona. He puts the event of ‘Babari Mosque Demolition’ by the Hindus in the city of Ayodhya—the birth place of the Hindu legendary God Lord Ram, that day in the following terms, see:

Shouting slogans like ‘Victory to Ram!’ Hindustan is for Hindus’ and ‘Death to the Muslims!’ they began tearing the mosque apart with sledgehammers, ropes, pickaxes and their bare hands.

One after another, like symbols of India’s traditions of tolerance, democracy and secularism, the three domes of the mosque fell to the ground. In the little more than four hours the entire structure had been reduced not just to ruination but—quite literally—to rubble. (74)

William, then, reports the post Babari communal violence that spread through the entire nation, in which millions of Muslims and their properties were attacked, torched and assassinated. Even Bombay like most cosmopolitan city was set to blaze after the reporting of the event of a Hindu family brutally roasted alive in a petrol bomb attack on 7th of January 1993. The Shiv Sena leader, Bal Thakaray openly claimed that the Muslim must learn the lesson or be prepared to be dealt with as the Jews in the Nazi Germany.

William tries to collect Rajmata’s reaction to all this brutal treatments towards the Muslims by her party and its alliances. The response was astonishing; this coy Granny was of the opinion that the Muslims must respect the creed of the majority. She was not prepared to pay heed to the atrocities exercised against the minorities. Thus, William concludes:

In her blindness, the Rajmata remains an unsettling reminder that you need not be personally objectionable to subscribe to the most deeply objectionable political creeds: charm and sweetness are not guarantees against either violent
nationalism or the most xenophobic religious fundamentalism and bigotry.

(79)

The postscript to this essay reports the formation of an alliance government in India in the lead of BJP, and the appointment of party’s moderate personality, Atal Bihari Vajpayi as the prime minister. But still, in the decision of exploding the ‘Hindu’ nuclear bomb and the demands of erecting a temple at the site of the blast, William sees that the extremist elements are yet to be tamed.

**East of Eton**

*Lucknow 1997*

William quotes the editorial remarks of the *Times of India* in the issue of the Republic Day 1997, with the addition of his own remark that though there might have been widespread celebrations marking fifty years of Indian Independence in Britain, in India there has been much less rejoicing:

...in this landmark year not much remains of the hope, idealism and expectations that our founding fathers poured into the creation of the Republic. In their place we now have a sense of abject resignation, an increasing sense of drift. We are ostensibly on the verge of a global breakthrough; yet the truth is that the deprived India is eating voraciously into the margins of the prosperous India. (83)

He captions an astonishing and barbarous incident of the murder of a teacher by some mysterious shooters while he was resting in his room at the La Martiniere, India’s oldest and once it’s most distinguished public school of Lucknow on the dawn of 7th March 1997. The incident took place just one month and eleven days after the celebration of the fiftieth Republic Day in India. The PT instructor of the school, an Anglo-Indian—Fredrik Gomes was shot dead. The murder remained a mystery, but the investigation brought out the facts of many a variety of fatal weapons being circulated among the school students. The nutshell question that raised its head was: “If India’s increasingly endemic violence and corruption could creep into such an institution, what was the hope for the rest of India?” (83)

The murder of a teacher in the school and the needle of suspicion pointing towards the possibility of the culprits being among the lot of the school students is
enough/ clear indicator of the index of the law and order situation in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

William observes that like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh is also travelling on the tracks of Dark Ages. The Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav has on his Assembly a grand total of 150 members with criminal records. Even his score of criminal offences reached up to a couple of dozens. The entire political system had become corrupt with the weapon trafficking, entertaining the thugs and outlaws. The power was demonstrated through outnumbering the rivals with the extravagance of deadly weapons and the acts of atrocities on the weaker parts of the rival groups. To drive his point home as to what extent the political degradation has acquired its apex in the state, William quotes Mohan Sohani, the Lucknow correspondent of the Calcutta Statesman, who has been monitoring the decay of UP for more than a decade:

There is intense rivalry between the leaders of the different political parties to recruit the state’s biggest criminals and gangsters. Of course, the criminals are delighted. Once they become politicians, the police who used to hunt them down have to protect them instead, while the cases which are pending against them – murder, abduction, banditry—will either be dropped, or else investigated so slowly they will not make it the courts for decades. Moreover, if they are already in prison, and win their seat from behind the bars, they will almost certainly be released on bail to attend parliament. It’s just getting worse and worse. Democracy is badly under threat. (88)

When he comes to know that such political training starts at the early stage in the schools and colleges, William goes to see the students of the Habibullah Hostel—the student resident hall most notorious for the group wars among the students backed and supported by rival political parties. Here, the students talk to him about their war with the students group of Victoria Hostel and their attempt to murder the leader of the opponent group, Abhay Singh. The students’ reporting clearly hint that this sort of fierce activity added to their qualification to be eligible and strong claimers of nomination by one or the other political party as their candidate in the state or central elections.

The students whose best companions, in an ideal case, should be books and journals and to excel in the exams and competition must be their chief concerns, but instead here they are well nigh immersed in the blood shot business of murders and revenges. When asked, one of them with pride replies: “The guns we buy in the bazaar, the grenades we make ourselves” (92).
The narration of the group war among the students does not in any aspect lack or fall short of the wars among the professional Gangsters. There are ample weapons and ammunitions, and somewhere the police appear but in the form of spectators only. They could even take law in their hands and beat anybody when their purpose is not served. They could run rampage in the hospital and could beat doctors too:

“We took them (their wounded friends who got injured in a tussle with the opponent group) to the hospital,” said Pravin, “but the doctors wouldn’t operate. They said it was a police case and they couldn’t touch them. So we beat the place up. We trashed the emergency ward and burned the ambulance. We hit the doctors and tore the clothes off the nurses and shoved injections up the doctors’ back-sides. We said, “Save them,” but the doctors said, “They’re dying. Let them die.” In the end the police came and thirteen of us were arrested.” (93)

When the author advised them to make peace and leave this dirty power game and told that if they were not turning goondas, the response reflects the whole mindset of the youth---

No: we’re students. We’ve only become goondas because of the situation. If we stop now we’ll be shot dead. We regret that politics is getting more and more violent and that we have to use guns for self-protection. But the psychology here is such that people without muscle-power can’t do anything. If it’s necessary to use muscle-power, then that is what we will have to do. (93)

And,

Right now you can’t fight election without a pistol. Naturally we are sad. But that is the situation. Whatever the situation is, you must adjust to it. (93)

The plight or the snap shot of the political power game in the state of UP as presented by Dalrymple here in this essay is just a glimpse of the real scenario. And one can imagine the future of the nation whose youth has taken the road to violence. It is true that it is only one side of the social reality; there is much constructive work too. The youth of India has excelled in many areas of life. There are ample examples of quality enhancement in many fields. In certain fields the Indian youth has proved superior on the worldly horizons...but still one cannot avert eyes to the facts presented in this essay.
William’s travels in the Rajasthan State bring him at the close quarters of the unique socio-political traditions of this Land of the Kings. Quite different from that of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, still the issues based on the same line of caste-wars and higher-lower division of society, atrocities by the higher and privileged on the weaker section of society—capture his attention and the essays voice the great drift between the modernistic developing India and the one that struggles to keep hold of what has remained in prominent existence for centuries in the name of conventions.

The Sad Tale of Bahveri Devi

The sad tale of Bahveri Devi is William’s close following of an atrocious incident with a poor lower caste lady in the village called Batteri. Having come to know about the incident through the newspaper reporting, William visits the village personally and witnesses the real hostile treatment to the victim by the entire village community. He also observes the near wreckage spirits of the victim’s family, and brings forth the facts of the whole matter in journalistic way.

The village of destination, Batteri falls some fifty kilometres away from the nearest city Jodhpur. William sets out in the company of Sanjiv, a journalist from Jaipur.... Though he is going there to have a close look at the case of Bahaveri Devi, his gaze never misses the to view and narrate the landscape outside as the car travels from the urban to country side of Rajasthan. And the same narration also stands symbolic to the mental landscape of the Bahveri Devi.

For a while the country is green and fertile. Sometimes you turn a corner and the fields ahead blaze bright yellow with ripening crop of spring mustard. But the further you drive, the drier and drier it becomes. Winter wheat gives way to drooping sunflowers; dust-devils circle; melon beds tangle amid the sand flats of the scrub. Turning right off the tarmac road and across a level crossing, you pass for miles amid mile along the narrowing dirt tracks the settlements grow poorer; the camel throne closes in. The colour drains away, but for the odd flash of red sari as a woman winds her way to well. (99)

The village appears “a silent, half deserted and strangely sinister place” (99); and the first responses to their inquiry about Bahaveri’s address make them aware
about Bahveri and her family’s plight. She is openly addressed with insulting terms ‘bitch’, ‘liar’ etc, and held responsible for bringing shame on their village.

Since from all sides Bahveri was considered the root of all the troubles in the village and had brought the outside agencies to intervene into the matters which could have been easily resolved within the village by their own panchayat...she and her family were thrown out of all the social circles and they led the lives of total boycott.

The real trouble stood at the issue of child marriages at Badri’s place. Badri Gujjar was the local serpanch and the political leader of the district’s dominant caste, the Gujjars; whereas Bahveri was the ‘sathin’(a lady social as well as medical worker who instruments awareness among the ladies of the local area). As per her responsibility, Bahveri tried to prevent Badri from marrying his one year old granddaughter as he infringed the law by doing so. Badri’s political and social status helped him and the marriages went on despite Bahveri’s repeated warnings. But Bahveri’s, a lower caste ladies’ intervention in his family affairs seemed a sort of dent to his social prestige, Badri publicly vowed to teach Bahveri a lesson.

In his rage to avenge his insult, Badri and his associates captured Bahveri and beat her husband and raped her. By doing this they wanted to show her her place and position. Badri was sure that his political background was strong enough to subdue any possible reactionary steps by Bahveri.

In fact, Badri was right. Initially there was no support and sympathy from any side that considered Bahveri’s pains as any matter of consideration. On the contrary, Bahvery became the butt of shame for the village whose lies incurred a great damage to the village’s reputation.

William here pin points the social as well as the political dominance and arrogance of the upper castes that the lower caste society member is not even supported by the other fellow beings of his/her own caste; and there is a total boycott. Even, the legal proceedings were kept deliberately slow and lazy that ultimately helped to paralyze the case.

William finds entirely another version of the story at Badri Gujjar’s place. Even the claim was Badri and his son were not even present in the village when there was a tussle between Bahveri’s husband and the village priest over the issue of a cow’s ownership. And the rape issue was Bahveri’s invention just as a woman of a mean and base character could do nothing else than this.

William too felt the same when he heard the police officer confirming Bahveri’s being type of a base character and might be lying in order to avenge her insult...and
on this grounds, as he claims, he lost all his interests in the case and dropped the idea to consider it with any seriousness.

But the development in the case after the entry of Kavitha Srivastav, changed the whole course of the event. Being the trainer of Bahveri, she had full trust on Bahveri and her second motive was not just to secure justice to Bahveri but also to set an example in the society that law was sovereign, otherwise she knew the social awakening that had started taking place in the comparatively highly conventional rural areas of Rajasthan through the system of ‘sathins’ would meet an utter failure. Kavitha’s efforts reaped good fruits for Bahveri and ultimately justice N. M. Tibrewal, the High Court Judge made severe comments on the ‘highly dubious’ role of the police in the entire legal investigation and imprisoned the accused.

On getting the news of Bahveri’s triumph, with revived interests in the case, Dalrymple once again visits Batteri. He notes on this second visit the villagers’ attitude towards Bahveri was greatly changed, Bahveri herself too appeared relaxed with a sense of satisfaction generated through having received the justice. The plight at the Badri’s place was now weaker, Dalrymple notes, as all the working males had been imprisoned; there was no body to take charge of the agriculture activities and the things became hard on their part.

**Caste Wars**

*Jodhpur, Rajasthan, 1990*

In this essay, the focus concentrates upon the atrocious attack on Dr. Tyagi’s dispensary set up at Gagadi village near Jodhpur. As per, Dr. Tyagi about three truck loads of high-caste Rajput youth raided his campus and turned everything into ashes—“everything we had built up over seven years.”

The reason why the high upper caste Rajput hates the mission and the activities of Dr. Tyagi is simple and linear. Dr. Tyagi’s institution tries to literate and educate the ‘Harijans’ or ‘the so called untouchables’. Dr. Tyagi feels that because of his welfare courses for the downtrodden, the upper castes are getting deprived of their traditional stock of ‘labourers’ and the ‘doers of their dirty jobs’. And this aggravates them towards his activities.

But, Dr. Tyagi’s logic is really impressive when he says:

An institution like ours needs such incidents if it is to regenerate forward. It highlights the injustice the Harijans are facing.” And very strikingly makes as
point to Dalrymple,” You yourself wouldn’t have come here if this had not happened. (112)

Dalrymple brings out many facts regarding the rigid caste system in the Hindu society especially in the villages of Rajasthan. He aptly observes:

In West, as everywhere in the world, there is a caste system of sorts, and dress is an important element of it: a pin stripe suit and tie places the wearer in one caste, a workman’s dirty overalls in another. What is different about the Indian model is its rigidity and its central place in Hindu philosophy.

In much of rural India, caste still defines not only what you wear, but where you live, what you follow, whom you marry, even the colour you paint your home. Every detail of life in the traditional Indian village, where eighty percent of Indians still live, is regulated. (115)

Not only this, Dalrymple drives his point home by bringing into the span of discussion the fact that such deep rooted ‘caste-system’ can create a political and social havoc and a movement, massacres and murders throughout the whole Indian sub-continent. He brings into discussion the issue of the ‘Mandal Commission’s provisions for the Reservation of posts in Government jobs for Dalits’. This provisions made the upper caste youth perceive that their rights to have government jobs are shrinking and they literary opened agitation against the Government. In one such event of expression of the protest against the provision of Madal Commission, Rajiv Goswami, a young man from a middle class Punjabi Brahmin family, set himself ablaze and died. Rajiv’s death proved catalytic agent and added fuel to the protests movement.

The caste system is so deeply rooted in the Indian society that the upper castes feel the increased ratio of reservation quota would turn the hierarchy upside down and the persons of the lower castes would begin to enjoy more success and power in the time to come. But, William also puts the case of the Dalit making success on their own by siting the case of Gadwada village near Jodhpur. Here the ‘Harijans’ have obtained great economical success in their leather work business, and set a grand example of upward progress.

Still in the majority cases the ‘harijans’ find their place at the lowest and be the butt of hatred with no apparent crime on their part. And, Dalrymple ends his discussion that with this kind of situations being prevalent, especially in the rural regions of
Rajasthan, one can just hope for the removal of the stigma of the caste system in the course of time and with the better fruits of spread of education.

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**Sati Mata**

In this essay Dalrymple picks up the most debated issue of reviving the age old tradition of Sati.

As per the incident, in the Deoral village, on 4 September 1987 Roop Kamwar, a young and ‘exceptionally beautiful’ 18 year old girl mounted her late husband’s pyre and was burnt to death. Roop’s husband had died after a brief illness. Since they belonged to the higher Rajput caste, there was no possibility of re-marriage of this childless eighteen year old and ‘exceptionally beautiful’ widow. And as per the incident narrated by the famsily members of her in-laws,

The following morning, (she) the young widow appeared at the door of the family’s eighteen-century haveli. She was dressed in her finest wedding sari, decked in jewels, with her hands brightly painted with bridal henna..... (124)

They say she firmly resisted all attempts, by both her in-laws and the village brahmins, to dissuade her from becoming a Sati. (125)

They say she smiled beautifully from the pyre as the flames danced around her. (125)

What interests and rather puzzles Dalrymple is the multifaceted stories being weaved around the whole incident. Even the media industry, the most responsible social enterprises go on reporting the news in unauthentic baseless vein.

Dalrymple makes it clear from his study of the whole incident and after having done his personal investigations that on this issue there are two forking streams of the Indian society:

The issue highlights a national divide in India, showing the growing mental gulf that now separates the towns from the villages of the sub-continent, a gulf into which all discussion of the Deoralasati has become lost. Most secular urban Indians, and especially the feminist lobby, have started from the assumption that in the late twentieth century no educated woman could possibly commit
sati, ahd that Roop Kanwar’s sati could only have been forced. The villagers of Rajasthan, male and female, have very different perspective. (129)

....in rural Rajasthan the villagers are quite unrepentant, and continue piously to revere past Satis. (128)

Even the fact that over 750,000 people turning up at the site of sati at Deorala village and four hundred turning up to worship sati mata everyday even after seven months of the incident demonstrates the huge drift in the perspective.

Article 17 of the Indian Constitution reads:

Untouchability’ is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘Untouchability’ shall be an offence in accordance with law.

Bhanwari was gang raped on September 22, 1992 in retaliation for her activities, and then faced hostile police machinery that refused to register the case, and a male doctor at the primary health center refused to conduct a medical examination. The medical examination was finally conducted after 52 hours, leading effectively to the destruction of evidence of rape. The trial at the sessions court began only in October 1994 and the judgement which was passed chose to disregard the evidence of Bhanwari Devi and her husband Mohan (who had witnessed the rape) and to give undue weight to the medical evidence. In passing his judgement, the judge commented that:

The court is of the opinion that Indian culture has not fallen to such low depths; that someone who is brought up in it, an innocent, a rustic man, will turn into a man of evil conduct who disregards caste and age differences and becomes animal enough to assault a woman. [Rajagopal and Dutta, 1996:28]

Thus, the statements in the judgment itself contradict the above quoted Article 17. And what is more alarming is the trial judge’s acquittal of the accused on the grounds that “rape is usually committed by the teenagers, and since the accused are middle-aged and therefore respectable, they could not have committed the crime. An upper caste man could not have defiled himself by raping a lower–caste woman.” (Emphasis added)

In the caste and political power games of the issue, a new dimension that is illuminated is the issue of poverty. As Aruna Roy aptly pin points:
Bhanwari Devi’s valiant battle in Rajasthan has taught us the importance of looking at violence against women in poverty debate. Here, again, poverty has been a critical factor---for Banwari Devi to fight her battle, she has to be able to afford the fees of a lawyer.

The root cause of the whole Bhanwari issue is the evil of child marriages still prevalent in the rural regions. Mahatma Gandhi denounced this system from all the perspectives. He expressed his views against this evil at every possible opportunity, and in Young India, he mentions under the title “Curse of Child Marriages” that the practice of child marriage is not only weakening and harmful to the young age girls who become mothers owing to such marriages but the generation thus delivered face severe problems. And even after seven decades, the same issue causes troubles draws attention to the needs of social awakening.

The same concern may be expressed for the ‘Sati’ issues. As for Dlarymple’s attractions and interests in the issue of Sati, a nice explanation is found when John Staton Hawley confesses “Modern research confirms what traditional Brahminical treatises imply—that ‘sati’ has always been very much exception rather than the rule in Hindu life. Yet, from the time of Marco Polo until well into Nineteenth century (Sati was officially abolished in Bengal in 1929), Westerners publishing dairies of their travels in India always included a chapter on Sati they had witnessed.

Thus, capturing of these three issues bring on the surface and make the point of debate how on one front India’s infrastructural development is claimed with pomp and gong, the issues of upper—lower caste disseminations, caste issues and the attempts or the claims to revive the superstitious traditions like Sati show much work still remains to be done at the rural regions of the nation.

As a traveller and especially being the writer, William dives deep into the issues which with their flaring colours stand apart from the ordinary commonplace routines. The entire exercise and pains undertaken at his ends are the attempts to learn exactly what operates at the root causes of such happenings. Moreover, the probe also encompasses the measures as to what extent the Indian sociological temperament has come to the statures of adaptability of the urbane westernised mode of development or still are they at the struggle to adopt or not the New Developments or rather go back to the conventional heritage that the centuries old culture is holding and adoring in one or another form.
The New India

In the third group of essays titled ‘The New India’, William Dalrymple brings under the focus the modern social strides of the elite class of the metro cities of India which shows the direct impacts of the westernized culture. William here puts forward his observations on the city life of India, especially the metro-politan cities of India, which present the new face of developing India----the India of twenty first century, of the new Millennium.

Two Bombay Portraits

In ‘Two Bombay Portraits’ he presents the word sketches of two icons of modern India namely Baba Sehgal, the world’s first Hindi rap megastar and Shobha Dé, the lady English writer who has started a sort of writing which has been drastically labelled “dirty and filthy” in the staunch Indian circles. He notes that the flow of cash through the liberal economic policies has given birth to a new elite class in the Indian society, especially in the metropolitan complexes of India like Delhi and Mumbai. And under the waves of the western influences getting filtered through the world markets, the youth has adopted new age addiction to the party lives. As a result of this, a new wave of bars and discot heques have got booming and mushrooming in the cities like Bombay.

The rise of figure like Baba Sahegal in the form of the world’s first ever Hindi rap star, the success and the immense financial booming of his programmes, all this is enough to show how fast the country’s youth getting the dying of the western cult. The trend was accelerated, as Dalrymple comments, by the entry of the ‘Star TV’, which brought the Indian youth in direct touch with the current trends on the western entertainment industry. The figure like Baba Sahegal got the direct advantage of it, and it is clearly reflected in the increasing popularity and fattening of the sales figures of his recorded cassettes. Dalrymple nicely puts:

....he(Baba) also became the first rock singer ever to become a star in his own right: previously, celebrity status in India had been reserved exclusively for actors, holy men and cricketers. (139)
Shobha Dé presents in her creative arena the tantalising details of the lives of the multimillionaires and the scandals that their wealth gives them legacy and privilege to enjoy. This kind of writings, though not welcome openly by any elite literary levels, and adversely criticised for the stinking ‘cheapness’—finds its way among the people and sells boominglly. This as Shobha herself claims, “I write readable trash---commercial novels. But I don’t think “commercial” is a dirty word.....There is a market out there, and I’m filling the slot” (153).

William notes that Shobha De has been the most adversely criticised lady. Her bold and scandalized works have won her the titles like ‘Maharani of Malice’, ‘the Empress of Erotica’ and ‘the Princess of Pulp’. Besides her bold novels serving the audience with the tantalising sensational stuff, Shobha also runs a successful gossip column-‘Nita’s Natter’ in India’s most prestigious glamour magazine, ‘Stardust’.

William brings out the quantum traits of Shobha De’s personality. According to him:

Turning herself in to the Jackie Collins of India has not been very easy: her notoriety is the product of hard work. Born Anuradha Rajyadhyaksha, daughter of a Brahmin district judge from small-town middle India, she has spent forty-three years becoming Shobha De., the rich and fashionably unfashionable pulp novelist from metropolitian Bombay.(146)

Shobha began her career as a successful model, at a time, as William rightly points out, “When joining a modelling agency in India was considered about as respectable as joining a brothel.” In her personal life too she has taken bold steps just as that of her professional life. She left her first husband, picked up a French lover, and then married another man. To take such socially outrageous steps, that in the highly traditional Indian society, William truly observes, requires a dynamic personality as well as daring outlook. Even Shobha herself admits in her response to Dalrymple’s one of the questions: “No, I love this town. At least here I can live on my own terms. I wouldn’t be able to function anywhere else.” “I don’t think Shobha De (I) would be allowed to exist anywhere else in India. Another city would have crushed me” (157).

Shobha has created her own circles and style of life. Just like her creative world, she too lives the life of glamour. And this is why even to the person like Dalrymple who is the traveller of the world she appears an enigmatic personality:

Spend a week with her, meet her friends, ride in her cars and go to her parties—at the end of it you are still left with a lurking suspicion that you have stumbled on to some sort of film set peopled with actors speaking lines from a
Jilly Cooper script. Back to your hotel room you look through your notes and ask yourself yet again: “Is this woman for real. (147)

**Finger-Lickin’Bad: Bangalore and Fast-food Invaders**

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*Finger-Lickin’Bad: Bangalore and Fast-food Invaders* presents the story of the city of Bangalore. From the changing food habits and the agitations bred out of this change among the certain social circles and manifestation and outburst of such underlying and suppressed protests into the destructive attacks on the multi-national Fast-Food stores, to the protest against the “Miss World Contest” in the Indian Cyber city Bangalore, the social circles appear broadly forked on the issues. On one hand there are the conventionalists who protest such events taking shape in the name of dragging the nation once again back to the points of “Cultural Imperialism”, whereas there are the modernistic elite groups who claim it to be the stepping stone through which India could secure a true cosmopolitan status, and they on their part ridicule those who oppose this as being insecure lot who cannot face the world.

William opens his discussion on Bangalore on the foundation facts that it has been the city of metropolitan cult right from the course of the history. William maintaining his observations on Bangalore writes that the protests against the Western influences would be taken naturally, had they been displayed in the other Indian territories, but when such extremities take place in Bangalore, they generate a shock on the grounds that, “For although since 1947 India has had an understandable fondness for protectionist isolationism, the one place you would not expect to find any such introversion was Bangalore, which has long prided itself, with some reason, on being the most cosmopolitan city in India” (159).

William maintains a discourse on the India’s adoption of the Fabian socialism ideology in time of Nehru. He presents his study on the transformations of the Indian economic policies along with the observations of the other experts on the nature of Indian economical and cultural trends. What points he wants to draw upon are with the liberalised economic policies and by opening doors to the world market, the Indian society has been abruptly exposed to the best products and services available in the world market. This includes the range of the cosmetic products to the Automobile
sector, even the TV and other media and the entertainment industry too. The Indian society and market which until now was monotonously dominated by specific stereotype products now started teeming with greater and better options.

Bangalore wore a new identity in the new wave of development. It started moving up in the graph of development on account of its developing as the South Asian Hub of software Industry. And the Bangalore which once was famous for the Botanical gardens has now acquired a new label of ‘silicon valley’.

Since Western software companies started arriving in the city ten years ago—attracting in the process a wave of highly skilled expatriate Indian software engineers to return home to work for them—the Bangalore streetscape has altered beyond recognition. The city now has the only supermarkets in the subcontinent, and a shopping mall modelled, so proud Bangalorean will tell you, on one in Los Angeles. (163)

The cosmopolitan temperament was most suited to the high profile Miss World contest, and so was the projection--- ‘in mid-October 1996, it was announced that the 1997 Miss World contest was to be held in Bangalore’ (165).

The announcement aggravated the suppressed protest in the minds of the extremists. The entire event began to be presented as “an assault on traditional Indian morality”. All the opposing groups e.g. RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Muslim Jmaat-i-Islami, forgetting their internal enmities and feudalisms, stood together in the protests against such a contest.

William nicely dissects the real problem behind this sort of protests. His conclusions on the entire affair draw different dimensions of the entire issue. As per his views, the abrupt and enormous development and the adverse effects of these modernistic advancements are in the roots of the explosion of the aggravations.

Everything changed overnight when the city gained the reputation of being the cradle of India’s high-tech revolution. Foreign investment and personnel poured in at a quite extraordinary rate. Unemployed migrant workers followed quickly on their heels, and what has been known as the Garden City suddenly found itself ringed with stinking shanty towns. Because of this unparalleled immigration, between 1971 and1996 Bangalore’s population jumped from 1.7 million to over six million, making it one of the fastest growing cities in the world. The pressure on the land grew, causing house prices to rise stratospherically, increasing by 50 per cent per annum throughout the early 1990s. As population grew worse and the city’s green space began to disappear, the average temperature rose by several degrees every year. (167)
William states it clearly that these demonstrations of the people are just their responses to what is happening to their Bangalore. People’s fear finds vent through their violent attacks on the food restaurants or their joining hands to protest the Miss World contest being held in Bangalore considering all these as the direct attacks on the Indian culture. But actually their fear lies in the fact that in the very near future everything about Bangalore will change. To prove this, he brings in the point of T. P. Issar’s book on Bangalore’s architecture at the end of 1980s being turned into just that of archival value as 95 per cent of the buildings he described in the book have been pulled down just within ten years under the pressure of increasing population.

When William argues to Professor M. D. Nanjundaswamy, President of Karnataka State Farmers’ Association, that ‘Three thousand tandori restaurants in London don’t seem to have destroyed British culture’(171), his defensive stance to the western cultural invasion comes on the surface. Equally, his counter argument to the increase of the cases of sexual harassment and eves teasing on account of the westernised television programmes lead to his safeguarding the western culture as he points it out that ‘Hinduism has celebrated the erotic for millennia’ and produced the vast legacy of ‘Kamsutra’ and the erotic art at ‘Khajuraho’. So, according to him, to argue just the display of the beauty contest would cause a serious damage to the Indian culture is nothing but a superficial excuse. He compares the modern sense of decorum and morality in India to the English Victorian social currents and calls them nothing but ‘home-grown’. And brings out the historic fact that “.... after all, the women of Bangalore, as else in the south India, went about bare-breasted until the British encouraged them to cover up in the nineteenth century” (173). His mind constantly keeps on making some implied comparisons between the Indian and his Western culture and when, in India, there is a direct blaming on the western culture, not only he strongly retaliates but tries to bring out the traits which contribute to prove the western culture more better and superior too. He concludes with the Moghul Emperor Babur’s remarks, and he seems to be in the full agreement to it, on India in the early sixteenth century, “In India everything is done differently from the rest of the world. Nothing will ever change this” (173).
The South

This fourth group of essays presents William Dalrymple’s travels in the Southern part of Indian subcontinent. His travels in the south and observations find a shift of the focus. Whereas his North presented and snapshot the political and social anarchies which made the people sigh at every stage that it was the time of degradation, the age of Kali, the South presents the increased faith of the common man in the godly authority, another facet of the common man’s frustration from the present situations through which he has been living, and seeking a sort of miraculous relief by going into the abode of the supreme authority.

At the Court of the Fish-Eyed Goddess

In ‘At the Court of the Fish-Eyed Goddess’ Dalrymple depicts the famous Meenakshi temple and the city of Madurai at the time of the famous ‘Teppam Festival’. In his typical style he explores the city, meets the local as well as the visitors of the city, studies the various activities being performed within and outside this centre of sacred faith, brings out the myths, history, and the Western connection to the ancient city of Madurai, and cites the ancient travelers to the city who have their own unique views expressed in the context of this city. The whole essay helps the reader to have a virtual tour to Madurai in the genius company of Dalrymple.

Dalrymple visits the city at time of the famous ‘Teppam Festival’ when the whole city is on the move in the great procession for the annual bathing ceremony of the Minakshim Amma and her consort lord Sundareshvara. He moves along the entire route of the procession recording his observations taking all the minute details which arrest his attention.

The striking fact that makes him wonder is the continuity of the ancient traditions and practices so forcefully and so naturally in this part of the earth that whereas their contemporary Deities like the gods of Thebes and the Parthenon have long been forgotten in the Western world, Meenakshi—the Fish-Eyed Goddess is revered with the utmost faith and her temple site still holds the status of the Tirtha, “a crossing place linking the profane to the sacred.”. Since the temple of Madurai stretches its existence from the time ancient, Dalrymple notes, the advantage of
watching its present festivals and its several traditions and practices performed is that these might be the same glimpses as might have been witnessed by Greek visitors to India before the rise of ancient Rome.

He brings out the whole history of the city of Madurai, just as the city had been an important terminus of the spice route, and the details of its existence are found to be noted in the West in the fourth century BC: ‘Megastenes, the Greek Ambassador who visited India in 302 BC, recorded the town’s legendary riches, and it is given pride of place in the earliest document detailing the spice trade, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, written by anonymous Alexandrian Greek in the first century AD’ (183).

Dalrymple tries to demonstrate that while the Ancient Western civilization was still in its cradle, ever since the region of Madurai has been the centre of prosperity and civilization. The rich arena of this ancient cult is nicely recorded and reflected in the literary traditions which well bloomed around this area namely the ‘Sangam’ or the academy of Tamil poets. Besides the literary traditions, the region also gives ample evidences of developments in all sorts of arts and conceptual sociality from the time ancient. See how naturally Dalrymple’s eyes capture the one of the sculpture from one of the ten thousand pillars in the Madurai temple:

One for example, showed a Tamil village woman with a coir shopping basket and a baby strapped to her breast. Her head was turned so she could see a second baby she was carrying in a backpack, while beside her waked a third child, a little boy eating an apple; the woman’s hand rested gently on her son’s head. It is an image of startling humanity---the same sight can be seen today in any bazaar in Tamilnadu--- yet the statue predates the beginning of the Italian Renaissance by over a century.’ [Emphasis mine] (187)

In the spirits of a traveler, Dalrymple joins the procession and the visits the temple site of Meenakshi, which is standing just as a city within the city. The narrow streets and the beggars at the entrance arrest his attention, yet leaving them to their business he enters the holy shrine. The gopura, the ceremonial entrance has already picked up his attention even from the very distance as they dominated the ‘skyline’ of the city of Madurai. He compares them with the Cathedrals of Middle Ages of Europe, and gives a detailed description of them. To him this Gopuras appear great towers symbolizing the Indians’ faith in their deities:

They rise in great, tapering, wedge-shaped pyramids--- each layer swarming with brightly coloured images of gods and demons, heroes and yakshis—until three quarters of the way to their apex, they terminate in a crown of cobra heads tipped with a pair of cat’s-eared demon finials. The astonishing
complexity and elaboration of the gopura’s decoration is something you can see from far away, long before you are able to distinguish even the beginning of its detail. (177)

Equally interesting he finds the architecture and the stone carvings of the Meenakshi temple, which signify the faith and devotion for which the Goddess Meenakshi is worshipped, namely for the power of reproduction, for having more and more children with her grace and boons.

I passed under the Gate of Eight Goddesses and into the long, arced passage beyond. Inside, it was dark and magnificent. A forest of carved pillars --- on closer inspection lines of heavy breasted Hindu caryatids: yakshis, courtesans, goddesses and dancing girls---flanked me on either side. Everything about the architecture was deeply, and consciously, feminine: heading towards the innermost sanctuary of the presiding goddess, one sunk deeper and deeper into the darkness, down a long, straight, womb-like passage. (179)

And,

The conscious fecundity of the temple is evident in every aspect of its decoration... It is as if Meenakshi’s fertility is such that every inch of the stonework is organically sprouting with supernatural forms, just as the bare desert sprouts with camel-thorn after the rain. (180)

Dalrymple also confirms the details with the visitors of the temple. Out of curiosity, he follows the company of a newly wedded Bride and her friends to the inside the temple, just to know what they are doing, and he finds out that the friends of the Bride had taken her to a particular idol of a Yakshi giving birth to a child in order to secure grace for the Bride. He also talks with the Keralean devotees who have come all the way from their place to secure grace of the goddess in the form of some more children. His conversation with Mr. Bhaskar, a post graduate MSc in biochem from Mysore University, shows that the faith and devotion for the Amma is not limited to the village and illiterate strata of the society, but the people from the higher strata of the society too feel the same trance for the Goddess and the traditions of the festivals which stretch their continuity from the time ancient as the priest of the temple claims it to be the continuity of four or more centuries.

William seems to draw upon the note that the things will go on simply as they had descended from the time ancient with the spiritual couple enjoying their union every night in the temple of Madurai in order to secure the continuity of the universe.
Under the Char Minar
Hyderabad 1998

Under The Char Minar presents Dalrymple’s research on the City of Hyderabad the capital city of Nizam. He meets Mir Moazam and through his memories tries to make alive the gorgeous past of the city, which in the present lot of time faces the cruel consequences of sheer neglect and waiting ruins.

The whole essay presents the nostalgic visions of the Mir Moazam, who in his conversation with Dalrymple, shifts very naturally to the past glories of the city and her subjects that the present ruins state of the city makes him utterly unhappy. Along with the issues of weakening of the ancestral legacies of aristocratic Hyderabad, William’s conversations with Mir Moazam also bring in the issues of recent history of Hyderabad namely the events following the Indian Independence, the Nizam’s declaration of Hyderabad as the Independent state even from India and the eventual Indian Army Operation- ‘Operation Polo’ or ‘The Police Action’ in 1948, and the massacre of the residents of Hyderabad.

The essay opens with the depiction of Aristocratic life-style of Mir Moazam’s Grand Father, Fakrool Mulk, who had been the Deputy Prime-Minister in the Nizam’s government. According to Mir Moazam the principal passion of his grandfather was to get great buildings erected. He would go on his evening walk with the company of his men and as per his moods would draw the outline of the building in his mind on the ground with his walking stick which his draughts men would copy down and the next couple of days would pass in reviewing and revising the plans and then the masons would be commissioned to start the building. Mir Moazam claims his grandfather to have gifted one of his favourite palaces to the Nizam himself just when he came to know that the particular building fascinated the Nizam. Fakrool Mulk helped his hobby of Tiger shooting by building a track on the hill near his resident palace and on the track a stuffed tiger would be let loose from the top of the hill and he would fire on this stuffed tiger from his position. Another great aspect of Fakrool Mulk was his style of dinner. Mir Moazam informs William about the multi-course dinner of his grandfather, which observed strict protocol: “There was very strict protocol: we wouldn’t sit until asked to, and wouldn’t dream of talking until talked to. He did the talking, we responded” (195).
Like his Deputy Prime-Minister, Nizam’s own world was full of eccentricities. William brings in the account of Iris Portal, a friend of his Grandmother, who visited India in late 1930s:

The Nizam, said to be the richest man in the world, had no fewer than eleven thousand servants: thirty-eight dusted the chandeliers, others were employed only to prepare betel nut. In addition, he had three official wives, forty-two concubines and nearly twenty children. (197)

In all the conversational pieces of Mir Moazam there always rings the concern of the glories of Hyderabad being wasted. But among the ruins of the old ancient aristocratic traces and in the waves of new urbanization where everything is altered according to the new necessities, still, there are some place which are standing stern holding the graces and glories of past framed intact in them. One such place in Hyderabad is the Falaknuma palace. William describes the state of the building as it resisted the slaps of passing time just in the ‘red-wax sealed’ condition on account of certain legal encumbrance. It was originally the residence of the sixth Nizam, the father of Osman Ali Khan. The complexes to the east of this Falaknuma appeal greatly to Dalrymple:

They are wonderfully ebullient and foppish monuments dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with domes swelling out of all proportion to the bases, like a watermelon attempting to balance on a fig. above the domes rises the craggy citadel of Golconda, source of the ceaseless stream of diamonds which ensured that Hyderabad’s rulers would never be poor. Inside the walls you pass a succession of harems and bathing pools, pavilions and pleasure gardens— a world that seems to have jumped straight out of the pages of The Arabian Nights. (201)

In this connection he also brings out from the pages of the History of a love story of an English Resident Lieutenant-Colonel James Achilles Kirkpatrick with a Muslim lady Khair-un-Nissa, who had been a great niece of the diwan of Hyderabad. William points out the stir of concern that stormed in Britain at Kirkpatrick’s adoption of the Muslim style garments and way of life. William also curiously finds out the ‘scaled-down plaster model’ which Kirkpatrick got erected I order to allow his beloved wife who remained in the Purdah the idea of the truest designs of his newly built palace. He also mentions the neglected status of such valuable Historical evidence.

Next, William narrates the stories of people of Hyderabad’s love, trust and dependence on the tactics of magic. The person who practiced such magic was known
as Murshad and he enjoyed a high social status and people revered the Murshads in
the form of the close agents of Gods. Just as the stories of Mir Moazam appear
farfetched and fibs so are the talks of Begum Meherunissa, the wife of Mir Moazam,
about the Murshad appear fictional, but she claims them to have happened before her
own eyes so here Dalrymple’s researcher spirits present them as they have been
narrated by her and he himself remains away from making any personal comments on
them.

His second session of conversation with Mir Moazam shifts the focus from the
glories of the Nawabian Aristocracy to the fall of Hyderabad. Mir Moazam clearly
opines that the Nizam should better have negotiated with Nehru realistically exactly
when the British were leaving:

He (The Nizam) might have got a viable deal, a treaty that would have
allowed him to keep some form of real autonomy. That way a lot of bloodshed
might have been avoided. (207)

Even, the roots of Operation Polo, i.e. Nizam’s decision of declaring his
Nation Hyderabad an Independent nation seems full of foolish sentiments to Mir
Moazam:

Half-hearted negotiations dragged on, until eventually the Nizam decided to
declare outright independence from India. It was utter madness. Legally and
constitutionally he may have had the right to do so, but it was still quite
unrealistic. (207)

William confesses as he was warned not to open up the subject of the
Operation Polo with Mir Moazam as it was the most painful chapter of his life, he
cautiously encourages him on this topic. But Mir Moazam himself started giving a
detailed account of it. And his account must be the authentic one as he was the
collector of the region from where the Indian forces opened attack on Hyderabad on
the day of 13 September 1948.

William presents Mir Moazam’s account, without intervening, directly
through his own narration. It makes clear that Hyderabad proved very feeble against
the Indian land and air attacks and the whole affair came to a clear result within a few
hours only. Another fact he brings forth is the treatment they received just after the
invasion and being overpowered was the same as the one enemy nation extends just
after overpowering any nation:

When an Army invades any country---whether it’s Alexander the Great,
Timur, Hitlar or Mussoline—when it gets into a town, you know what the
soldiery does. It’s very difficult for the officers to control them. I can’t tell you
how many were raped or killed, but I saw the bodies of many. Old scores were paid off across the state. (209)

William here brings in the report on the massacre in the Operation Polo which Nehru got prepared on the fateful events, and some part of it being smuggled out of India and published under the title: ‘Hyderabad: After the Fall’ in America.

Now looking at the lost glories of Hyderabad Mir Moazam feels great pains, as he knows after the fall those who remained here in India were left with no legacy of the Aristocracy nor were they any bit accustomed to do any money-earning activities, so the only thing they were left with was their real estates, which they sold out eventually.

Thus, in ‘Under The Char Minar’ William unfolds another painful chapter of Indian history. He picks up not only the tresses of the glories of this city of Nawabs but purposefully holds it a background to the painful chapter of The Police Action, a troubled ordeal which he labels “a bloodbath comparable to parts of the Punjab during Partition” (210).

**Parashakti**

*Cochin, 1993*

This is the shortest essay of the entire collection in which William has dealt with the South Indian City of Cochin and especially the shrine of the Goddess Parashakti. The city attracts little of his attention in comparison to the temple of Chottanikkara where he spends maximum time in the company of Mr. Venugopal, a retired chief-engineer of All-Kerala Electricity Board.

Mr. Venugopal makes arrangements for Mr. William Dalrymple to be allowed inside the shrine as ‘Non-Hindus’ are literally not allowed to enter most of the famous temples of South. William opens the essay with the description of the treatment being given to the ‘possessed’ ladies at this famous temple. And in his conversation with Mr. Venugopal, he brings out the details of the ‘Healing Procedure’ as well as he himself observes all the ‘Healing’ procedure which claims to set the ‘possessed bodies’ free from the mighty claws of the Evil Spirits. In his talks Mr. Venugopal, about whom William is quite suspicious for his claim of being the ‘Retired Chief-Engineer’ as to him it appears to be an exaggerated claim, tells William that now the people have realized their mistake about the materialistic way of lives and have returned back to the spiritual avenues of religious faith and therefore the temple of
Parashakti now remains more crowded than it used to be few years before. William directly presents the views of Mr. Venugopal about the influences of the supernatural agencies on the Human beings and the reasons behind their this kind of activities:

We Hindus believe that some of the symptoms of epiletsy-delirious convulsions and mad utterances- are due to the effect of Yakshis, our spirits. These spirits have astral bodies only, and invisible. Their identity can only be guessed at by the symptoms of possessed persons, and also by the astrological calculations of our brahmins. Our feeling is that every evil spirit would like to unite with the almighty. But thanks to his bad deeds he cannot. For this reasons there are too many evil spirits roaming around in the atmosphere.

Now, the aim of these Yakshis is to get inside the bodies of weak-minded peoples. Then they think they will be brought a temple where some compensatory puja wil be done or them, and in this way they will get salvation. (216)

William also presents the mythical story woven around the Goddess Parashakti who is being known and worshipped in different names and forms in almost all the corners of India.

Once, a demonic yakshi desired a handsome young Brahmin, and so changed into a nubile Tamil girl to seduce him. Stopping at a holy man's hut the yakshi refused to enter and so the holy man realised the demon's true nature. He gave a red cloth to the young man and told him to run as fast as he could to the shrine of Parashakti and throw the red cloth over the idol.

As the young man ran out of the hut, the yakshi saw she had been discovered and regained her true form. She became as tall as a mountain with a mouth like a cave, and her hair was a mass of hissing cobras. The yakshi chased after the boy, and just as he neared the shrine and threw the red cloth over the idol, the yakshi pulled him from the gateway.

At that moment the Kali idol came to life. Seeing her devotee in trouble, the goddess brandished her sword and chased the yakshi into the forest. Beside a jungle pond the goddess caught the demon and cut off her head. Then she drank the yakshi’s blood. So much gore flowed from the corpse that to this day the pond beneath the temple has a reddish tinge. But the goddess Parashakti got a taste for blood and now she cannot live without it. (220)
William visits the temple at night with Mr. Venugopal in order to witness the rituals of exorcising the evil spirits from the bodies of the possessed ones by invoking the graces of the goddess by offering her her favourite appetite in the accompaniment of musical enchantment of her favourite verses. He minutely observes the treatment being extended towards the possessed ones. He incurs the displeasure of Mr. Venugopal by defining this kind of treatment as a sort of ‘faith Healing’. Mr. Venugopal feels offended and quite annoyed too at this kind of reflection from William, even William too feels he ought not to have expressed his views in this way. Mr. Venugopal declares his verdict at William’s interrogation about the supremacy of the Goddess, saying: “Parashakti is the supreme Goddess. But to see her work, maybe you must be god fearing and god-loving, only then can you really understand her power…” (224).

Thus, through this essay the beliefs about the special supernatural agencies at work and their taking hold of human entity and a full-fledged mechanism to exorcise such supernatural agencies at work in certain part of India are brought on discussion by William Dalrymple.

**On the Indian Ocean**

The fifth collection of the essays explores the coastal as well as the Islands on the Indian Ocean, so the author calls them ‘On the Indian Ocean’. There are three well textured essays on Goa, Sri Lanka and the Reunion, an island, in which William Dalrymple presents his reflections on the cultures, ways of life of the people of these particular regions. He also picks up some contemporary issues and digs History too in order to bring the region’s truest colours afresh to his readers. Compared to the previous groups of essays, here William appears more of a travel writer and his journalistic and judgemental attitudes seem giving way to the true traveling motives and his focus captures the impressive avenues of the place he visits.

**At Donna Georgina’s**

The first one is the essay on Goa, At Donna Georgina’s. He travels in this historical Portuguese territory on the Indian sub-continent in 1993 and captures the snaps of its glorious past as well as explores the History of it too. He meets and interviews Donna Georgina, whose name occurs in the title itself, and brings out the
things from her conversation which would seem shocking to any Indian but allow anybody outside India to fancy that it must be a place of western civilization within the Indian territory, as the residents of it too prefer to define themselves aloof from the Indian culture and emphasis the ‘otherness’ to the Indians. “Goa is the an area of great natural abundance , and the state is envied throughout India for its rich red soil and fertile paddy fields, its bittersweet mangoes and cool sea breezes”(228).

This is how Dalrymple introduces Goa. His historical interests are at work here and the consequence is the lively narration of the history of Goa:

In its earliest incarnation Old Goa was a grim fortress city, the head quarters of a string of fifty heavily armed artillery bastions stretching the length of the Indian littoral. But by 1600, the process that would transform the conquistadors into dandies had turned Old Goa from a fortified barracks into a thriving metropolis of seventy-five thousand people, the swaggering capital of the Portuguese Empire in the East. It was larger than contemporary Madrid, and virtually as populous as Lisbon, whose civic privileges it shared. The mangrove swamps were cleared, and in their place rose the walls and towers of vice regal palaces, elegant townhouses, austere monasteries and elaborate baroque cathedrals. (228)

He also presents the amatory temperament of Goa in his typical comparative measure by giving the description of the portraits of the Portuguese Viceroys which are in the state of total neglect in the abandoned convent of St. Francis of Assisi in Old Goa. He observes whereas the earlier Viceroys appear in their gallant and brave get ups, their later representative “Mascarenhas is a powdered dandy in silk stockings; a fluffy lace ruff brushes his chin. He is pictured leaning on a stick, his lips pursed and his tunic half-unbuttoned; he looks as if he is on his way out of brothel.” He goes further to make comparison between the transformation of the strong and sturdy Turkish Moguls into the “pale princes in petticoats” on the Gangatic plains and the transformation of the Portuguese conquistadors into “effeminate fops in bows and laces.” This gives the reader idea about the mastery and the sound study of the writer on the different phases of the Indian History.

As everywhere else on the Indian sub-continent, the precious and valuable ancient sites are facing sheer neglect on account of the modern commercial developments and lack of the desired awareness towards the value of such historical monuments. And as in other essays here too, William comes with his concerns:

The Panorama from the chapel’s front steps is astonishing. The odd spire, a vault, a cupola, a broken pediment can be seen poking out of the forest canopy.
You look down past the domes and spires of churches and monasteries, and see the evening light pick out the wandering course of Mandovi river beyond. (230)

The river is empty now: the docks are deserted; the galleons long sunk. Of one of the greatest cities of the Renaissance world, almost nothing now remains” (230). (emphasis mine)

His conversations with the Hostess, Donna Gorgiana brings out other aspects of the Goan people’s displeasures and sentimental bent towards their colonial rulers. Donna asserts to William that they were far happier and prosperous under the four century long Portuguese colonial reign than they are today. And she goes to the extent of calling the Indian Liberation operation the Botheration operation. She clearly opines that Goa has been looted by the political mafias of India:

When the Indians came to Goa in 1961 it was 100 per cent an invasion. From what were they supposed to be liberating us? Not the Portuguese, because the Portuguese never oppressed us. Let me tell you exactly what it was the Indians were freeing us from. They were kindly liberating us from peace and from security. (232)

Donna claims that Goa has become an unsafe place in comparison to it was under the reign of the Portuguese. She also expresses her concerns regarding the cutting of the forests and the spoiling of the natural resources in the name of the Industrial development. Donna is pained as the land owned by her people is being handed over to other by the Indian politicians in the reward of the votes. Dalrymple claims that the story of Donna and the expression of disrespect and dissatisfaction towards the Indian seizure of Goa from the Portuguese is the common trait among all the Goans. He also puts that like Donna Georgiana, even the educated Goans would talk about “crossing boards to India”, ’those Indians” and also about ‘their visit ‘home’ to their cousins in the Algarve or their brothers in Cintra. They feel they have to pay a bigger price to their financial prosperity that they have gained after being merged into the Indian territories as the natural innocent Goan temperament is being replaced everywhere by the corrupt and heterocentric.

The next painful score to Donna Georgina about Indian Political Goa is it is being the Tourist hot spot with all sorts of mean groups of people all over the world heading Goa in order to satisfy their indecent desires and making it the destination for illicit drug trafficking and sex rackets. She mentions in a highly complaining tone to
Dalrymple that such activities have spoilt the entire reputation of Goan culture. To Dalrymple she naturally responds to this sort of transformations of her Goa:

In fact, since 1961 we’ve had two invasions. First it was the Indians. They plundered Goa: cut down our forests and took away our woods. Their politicians created havoc. Then after that it was the turn of the hippies. Disgusting. That’s what those people were. Dees-gusting. All that nudism. And sexual acts: on the beach, on the roads- even in Panjim. Panjim! Imagine: kissing in public and I don’t know what else. Disgusting. (234)

In this way, the essay records William’s observations on Goa as to a greater extent the territory which is really a part of Indian sub-continent from the geographical perspectives, but the subjects of the territory feel being unworthily forced to move away from their distinct identity at the absorption of it to the Indian political system. He also deliberately wishes to draw attention upon the neglect of the precious Historical monuments as well as the encroachment of the varied social cultures upon the serene identity of this natural abode of the coastal land which has earned its distinct identity through the congenial reign of the colonizers for more than four centuries. The dissatisfaction and disrespect clearly gets filtered through what Donna Georgiana has to say, and how Dalrymple quotes her: “Drugs and sexual acts and I don’t know what else. I don’t know which is worse: those hippies or our modern Indian politicians. The Portuguese wouldn’t have allowed either” (235)

Up the Tiger Path : Jaffna

SRI LANKA, 1990

This essay presents the tiff between the Singhalese and the Tamil Tiger group on the Sri Lankan Island. Dalrymple has been sent, as he mentions, to Sri Lanka to cover the event of withdrawal of the Indian Peace Army from Sri Lanka with a note of failure in the mission of implementing peace. And Dalrymple doesn’t fail to mention that rather it was a defeat on the Indian side. He finds the event parallel to the retreat of Russia from Kabul, or that of fall of Saigon, just here too a large Army was sent to back foot position by a small but committed group. He also makes it clear that though this event of March 1990 held great significance on the currents of International political streams, it did not secure deserving coverage and space in the Western Media. Resolving the issue he himself projects the reasons for this. He mentions that
the issues of Vietnam or the Mujahidin of Afghanistan have got fair sized media coverage, but since the Tamil Tigers have been less friendly to the journalists they have remained “faceless, unsung, unknown” (to the Western World). And this absence of enough information on this group encouraged him to bring before the world the hidden recess of this group working with utmost discipline and devotion to their cause.

Through his constant following and acute observations, he outlines salient features of this group:

The Tigers were fanatically disciplined. There was a strict code of conduct on using the intoxicating materials, and if anybody found breaching it, the punishment was to be ready to be thrown out of the group, and the crime related to adultery would invite death penalty.

Their chief commander, Prabhakaran enjoyed sovereignty and was revered as a godly stature.

“The Tigers were suicidically brave.” and due to this, there were reports that the caught group members/ or sometimes whole of the camp committing suicide as soon as they found themselves under threat of being interrogated.

Every group member carried a phial of crystal of cyanide which they used to end their lives as a strategic weapon. (238)

Next, the Tigers were prolific in executing the masses of opponent groups and the frequencies of such massacres brought to the consequences was so high that it generates a just response in Dalrymple: “It was as if the Tigers actually enjoyed killing, as if to them it was a hobby, or even an art form. Yet this unpleasant cocktail of qualities has turned the Tigers in to arguably the most efficient and successful guerrilla group operating anywhere in the world today” (239).

Opening the chapters of the History of this Island, Dalrymple notes the genesis of the entire movement in a very brief but informative narration. As per it once the Tamil groups felt the threat of being pushed into the margins and felt the loosening grips on the political horizons, they started their violent retaliation and got collected with their mission of establishing their own unique and separate state “Eelam” or “Precious Land” ( ). Thus, the seeds of the foundation of Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were sown.

Dalrymple notes the History of the tiff between the two in a very interesting way:
The Tamils and the Singhalese have been neighbors in Sri Lanka for nearly three thousand years, and throughout much of that time they have been fighting each other. The north and east of the island is the preserve of the dark-skinned Tamils: small and sharp and hard-working and Hindu. Elsewhere the island is dominated by the Singhalese, a languid and strikingly beautiful race of fair-skinned Buddhists. (239)

William notes the clash between both these groups has become tremendously severe that “up to 1990, perhaps 150,000 people lost their lives in fighting. For an island whose total population is barely fifteen million, that is a colossal slaughter” (242).

Taking George, a Tamil speaking Singhalese driver as his escort, Dalrymple heads towards Jaffna—into the land of Eelam, a nearly banned for the outsiders. Along with the tense outside, he tries to fill the slot with the comic relief provided by George’s tactics. His eyes do not fail to capture the changing scenario moving from one part of the island to another. The flora and fauna, near Anuradhapura, the capital and Singhalese dominated area which was thick with green vegetations and replete with throbbing life is replaced by the arid savanna tracts as they approach Jaffna the Tamil territory.

Having crossed the arid savannas, passing through the road which was more of the display gallery or the holder of the reminiscence of the war which it has faced on the face with the full reserved craters created by the land mines and the scares of bombing and strafing, at Vavuniya, he finds a chance to have the first personal encounter with the Tamil Tigers, what surprises him is the age group of the Tigers, all the tigers were from sixteen to twenty age group. Actually, he had the previous experiences that these guerrillas never opened up and shared anything with the outsiders, yet once close to them, William throws the topic of weapons and it works...., the bored guerrillas start conversation with him with George as his translator. Apart from singing their glories in how they liquidated the enemies and how acutely their fellows worked to master the situation, William also make them to relate their bad moments too. To his question about bad and sad moments, one of the boys, rather hesitantly, narrates the incident of his leading patrol with his group and coming on to the Indians. However, others managed the escape but his friend being in danger of arrest had to swallow the phial. He said he could not still forget the dying face of his friend as owing to either the phial being old or anything else, it took time to die. The dying boy requested the Indians to shoot him, but they did not.
Having obtained permission from the authority, William proceeds to Jaffna, close to the head quarter of the Tigers, and this time he finds an opportunity to interview the most curtailed troop of the Tiger Group—the Freedom Birds, the regiment of beautiful Tamil Amazons, like their male counter parts, the girls also take pride in killings. To the query of the author if they did not feel bad about these merciless killings, the astonishing reply came naturally, that there was no room for feeling bad because those who were killed were the enemies and if they did not kill them, they would kill them too. William notes the zeal of these ladies not only for the freedom movement, but also for the social concerns for the ladies of their own society, and in the time of ‘peace’ they devoted their time in the social welfare of them. William nicely captures the extraordinariness in the troop of Amazons: “It was an extraordinary sight: six beautiful and feminine fourteen-year old girls, sitting relaxed and with their friends, giggling and joking, talking about guerrilla warfare as if it were O-level results, rock bands or boyfriends” (249).

Next, William approaches the Jaffna central office of the Tigers and tries to secure an appointment with their political chief, Anton Balasingham. Balasingham was the real brain behind the guns of these Guerrilla group, and his being Anglophile, William was sure that meeting him would surely open his way to the most mysterious asset of the Tigers, the Jungle Camp, where till that day no outsider was permitted. After a long day’s wait in vain to obtain official permission to approach the chief, William was really tired and sure that under one or the other alibi either his message was not reached to the desired end or might there be no provision for such a meeting in their strategy. Frustrated thus as he was instructing his driver to move, he by chance saw Balasingham along with his Australian wife, arriving in the office. He approached him, and he was happy to be interviewed by him. On the very initial questioning, William understood that none of the message of his request from the morning reached him. William finds in him to be “the textbook revolutionary, intellectual: quick witted and intense, fond of gesticulation and dogmatic generalization”( ). He discussed at length the ideals of their group, the development and the impactful fights and battles he and his group waged which he called “freedom struggle”. And at a very important juncture, William came out with his request to allow him to visit one of their jungle camps. To this Balasingham asserted it was really a difficult task, and that Prabhakaram would not grant permission for any of Jafna Junlge camp to be visited by any journalist. But he helped William by making some arrangements for him to visit the camp of Amparai, where his(Balasingham’s) friend ‘Castro’ was in charge.
Having got a ray of hope for his wish of visiting the jungle camp to be fulfilled, William took George to Amparai, reaching where he got the message from ‘Castro’ to be ready at nine next morning in order to be taken to the destination. William confesses that he had very little information about this ‘Castro’, who was considered one of the most brilliant young commander, and had imagined him to some hardened guerrilla leader, but when he faced him in person, to his great surprise he turned out to be a “shy, handsome figure” of his own age. As ‘Castro’ goes on talking about the operations undertaken by their group and the modus operandi adopted, William as he asserts himself, developed the sense of “Déjà-vu”, because all the ideas and strategies were either adopted or were inspired from the Hollywood action movies. Castro accepts the fact that watching the war films was a fair part of their training curriculum, and the camps are equipped with television and video-libraries: “War films are shown three times a week, and are compulsory viewing. We often consult videos like The Predator and Rambo before planning our ambushes. None of us are trained soldiers. We have learnt all we know from these films” (254).

Next, after strict security checking of several stages, they reached the Jungle camp. The camp itself had the infrastructure of a university.

It was the size of a university campus: a heavily camouflaged jungle town, built in and around a forest clearing. The buildings were surprisingly solid structures of wickerwork, bamboo and thatch: arsenals and hospitals, command huts and dormitories, restrooms and conference centers, refectories and lecture rooms. (255)

William notes here that there were around two thousand guerrillas in the camp, all studded with heavy weaponry and busy with their unified activities. What catches William’s attention is the average age group of these Guerrillas, just as at the earlier camp he visited; here too, they were all between eighteen and twenty – the age of playing, partying or love-making. William also note that they were all fiercely fanatic for their cause and enjoyed their tasks as sacred duties. He was not allowed for long in the camp.

After six months, in Delhi he remembers the plight of the people of Jaffna, the lot which was crushed between two warring forces. Even after the Indian forces had been withdrawn, the Sri Lankan Army was randomly attacking the Jaffna region with domestic explosives, causing a great damage to the property as well as the civilians of the area. As one civilian complains: “It is a living hell—that is, for those of us who are alive” (260).
The essay remains a unique example of war reporting as well as a piece of travel writing as William makes his readers confront an entirely unknown society of the Tamil Tigers, their way of life and the mission and motto with which they wage a war against the majority Government system, their sources of inspiration and strategy buildings. Moreover, his eyes keep on capturing the variety of flora and fauna of the region. Consciously or unconsciously he goes on addressing the western audience as all his comparisons, captioning go on in the western terms. For example describing the scenario at the Sri Lankan Island, he naturally takes resort of the Western references:

Although the event was getting little coverage in the Western press, it was, in its way, as extraordinary an event as the Russian retreat from Kabul, or, before that, the fall of Saigon. Once again, as in Afghanistan and Vietnam, a superpower army—India has 1.3 million men under arms—had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of a small but dedicated guerrilla group. (238)

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**On The Sorcerer’s Grave**

*On the Sorcerer’s Grave* is another superb piece of travel writing in which we confront William’s extraordinary talent and clutch of the art. In this essay William presents his trip to the Mountainous Indian Ocean Island, Ile de Bourbon, presently known as Reunion. In his unique style, he opens the essay with the famous incident of La Buse, the pirate’s accidently finding the Treasure and his speech at the time of being hanged and scattering the map of the treasure which he had hidden on the island.

William nicely weaves the Ethnography, Geography and the History of this Island. The Island, as he observes, is the place of most heterogonous cultures. Basically, the colony of the French, and being dominated by the French, on the superficial look, it might give one impression of the Frenchness in all walks of life on this Island.

For Reunion is still part of France; at first sight it appears to be every bit as Gallic, as developed and as prosperous as its distant mother country. The people all have French passport, the male-school leavers are obliged to go to France to perform their national service. The language is French, the television is French, the cars are French, the croissants and baguettes at breakfast are French, and the wines in the restaurants are defiantly and exclusively French.
Nine-tenths of the island’s trade is with France. It is as if Reunion lay just off the coast from Cannes, not ten thousand miles to the south. (266)

In the metissage lies the very essence of this island” (266)

What catches William’s attention is not the simple Frenchness of the place but the most uncommonly common cultural trait at this island which “the Reunionnais call ‘metissage’: the racial intermixture that has made the island a model of melting-pot multi culturalism.” ( ) Narrating the ethnographic details and examining the roots of this cultural intermixture, William notes, during the mid nineteenth century the place was mainly inhabited by several thousand French exiles who had taken abode at this place with the visions of farming the hill-farms on this island. Many of this populace were of Madagascan origin. In the course of time, the Tamil Muslims, Canton Chinese and Yemeni Arabs were imported in the form of indentured labourers to work for the plantation. Living close to close and being aloof from the main lands of the world, these different cultures influenced each other and as Dalrymple uses it, ‘melted’ into each other to formulate uniquely a novel form of social culture:

Today, these very different communities are intermixed in the most astonishing manner: there can be few places on the earth—and few moments in history—where so many radically different peoples, religions, cultures, languages and cuisines have become so spectacularly intermingled. (267)

The effects of this intermingling are conspicuous on the families, faith, food and language of the island. William drawn through curiosity inquires about this to the native persons and is presented with the facts which are capable enough to surprise anyone.

The most sensitive of the human issues, Religion has also got so much absorption in the different cultures and has acquired natural phase of routine life that even the faith and the bizarre practices are the results of these intermingling of different cultures. William notes that people’s faith and offerings at the tomb of La Buse is the result of this intermixing of the cultures. One more instance, he gives about this in:

Grandmere Kale, who is said to live in the island’s volcano, emerging to eat up Reunionnais children who don’t finish their greens or who refuse to do their homework, is a cross between the witches of European folklore and Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction. (267)

William also notes that this kind of mixture has also influenced the general outlook of the people and made them more tolerant and open to others:
The mixture of different faiths, often within a single family, has had a profound influence on the Reunionnais’ attitude to the world. It has made them unusually tolerant and open minded, but also deeply heterodox. (267)

Another important aspect of human life i.e. food has acquired strong influences, and made this place a sought after destination for the travelers as it has many variety of dishes to offer; many of them are brand new as they have been the results of intermingling of different cuisines.

More enjoyable for traveler, the island’s brand of Creole cooking is also wonderfully multi-cultural, and quite unique. It mixes French and Indian culinary enthusiasms with a dash of Arab, Chinese and Malagasy influence. The result is a fusion startlingly unlike any of its parent traditions. A typical Reunion meal might consists, for example, of cari z’ourite et cari pouple (a creamy sea urchin and octopus curry) and bredes (a spinach –like digestive); pudding might be gateau patate (a sweet, heavy potato-cake). To add to the complexity of the island’s cuisine, in some areas of Reunion Arab influence result is the use of cloves and nutmeg, Chinese influence in a taste of ginger, and Malagasy influence in a variety of delicious dishes with a coconut-cream base and several memorably disgusting once involving roasted wasp grubs. (268)

Language too finds the same variety as these different cultures have close states. There is no paucity of the elements of different languages in the local language of the Island: “The metissage has also formed the islanders’ language: they speak both conventional modern French and an impenetrable Creole patois which mixes Malagasy, Tamil and Arabic on a base of eighteen-century nautical French” (268).

Driven by curiosity, William visits the tomb of La Buse, which is the most visited place on the island and is the place of ‘black magic’ being practiced on the island. William notices that every night many people visit this tomb, and come with their bizarre offerings which include pack of cigars which people burn on the tomb with faith to be offered to the possessor of the tomb, the bottles of Brandy and so on. William also notes that the treasure that La Buse claimed to have hidden somewhere on the island is still hunted: “To this day the treasure has never been found, despite adventurers coming to Reunion to search for it for 250 years” (264) (Emphasis Mine)

Another thing William notes about this Island is the names of the places and the domination of the different parts of it. He brings out the historical facts that since the coastline of it has always been dominated by the colonist French, the coastal
places and the culture bear strong imprints of French influences, but as soon as one left the coastline and ventured within the mountainous part, one would see another incarnation of the island and the reason is still the simple one, the mountains were the hiding places for the escaped Malagasy slaves. The instance of it he nicely captures in the place name “Cilaos” which is a corruption of the Malagache “tsy laosana” meaning “the place from which you never return.”

William’s interest in history makes him dig into the lost facets of the Cilaos’ history. And as per it he presents that Cilaos was popular and fond destination for the colonial officials as the sight offered the deemed-European atmosphere and its brooks flowed with mildly radioactive waters which acted as healing sources to cure the officials of their rheumatic ailments. This continued until the land slid abruptly stopped the flow and killed the city dead soon after the Second World War. William here notes even the unexpected return of the waters in 1971 has not been of any help to the rejuvenation and restoring the earlier charms and glories to the city.

As per his typical pattern, William here too maintains a dialogue with the local person. Here, he meets the cilaos peasant Loulou and collects information about the way of life, traditions, beliefs and comes projects the real first hand information of the grass root levels. Loulou, the man deeply rooted with land of Cialos, informs him about the hardships and the change taking place on the island. In the conversation with Loulou it becomes clear that the natives of these mountainous regions looked at the French coastal dwellers with a great amount of suspicion and considered them as oppressors as the term they used for them “z’oreille” meant the cutter of the ears. From this the inference might be taken as there must have been such outrageous practices which planted a permanent fear and in the minds of the gullible natives of Cilaos. William also investigates the story of the great sorcerer La Sitarane. The concluding note that William puts forward bears his detailed scrutiny and the wholesome study of the entire culture of the Island; though the island bore its roots in the French culture, day by day with the intermixture of the different cultures on the island, it is becoming less and less French.

Certainly the façade was still there—the croissants, the baguettes and the burgundy—but at its heart the island seemed to be fast evolving its own quite separate identity, spinning off into its own orbit, as the metissage led to a constantly shifting fusion of faiths, ideas and superstitions. (277)
Pakistan

The essays under this title present William's travels in the land of Pakistan, more precisely, two of them are William's interviews of two celebrities of Pakistan, namely Imran Khan and Benazir Bhutto. The essays present William's detailed study of violence stricken environment of Pakistan and put on the surface the weakening traits of peaceful public life. His interviews and close following of Imran Khan and beautiful Benazir Bhutto provide great stuff for reading and give a life sketch of these celebrity figures as to how they spend their private hours, their fond activities and the company they prefer to be within their private lives. The essay “On the Frontier” presents the account of William's travels on the Pakistan-India border and showcases the wild play of weaponry and drug trafficking. In the essay ‘Blood on the Tracks’, Dalrymple picks up the historical Lahore Railway station which showcases the architectural merits and since being in the proximity of the frontiers has the provisions of being converted into the war time bunker. He also uses it to narrate the painful historical event of Partition.

Imran Khan: Out for a Duck

The man (Imran Khan) is a National Obsession. He combines the status of royalty, the prestige of a cabinet minister and the gossip value of a pop star in a country which doesn’t have any royals, whose cabinet ministers are hopelessly corrupt and whose pop stars are mostly Indian, and therefore national enemies. (281)

William has got the stuff of this essay on Imran Khan from his Interviews. At the very outset, he makes this clear that out of these two, the first interview he had taken when “Imran was a bachelor playboy and the captain of the Pakistan cricket team; then seven years later, after his marriage, when he had entered politics to campaign against corruption in Pakistani public life” (281)

William notes that the massive celebrity status that Imran enjoys in Pakistan would be in luck of very few successful persons. To give the rational idea of this he opens his talks about Imran with the instance that if a monstrous celebrity super-creature is produced by mixing several British celebrities and that new creature would
enjoy the gossip value such a gossip value is to Imran Khan in Pakistan. For William confesses that even the name of Imran or just having his Autobiography in hand would secure unbelievable favours at any corner in Pakistan. Be it the international Airport, a rickshaw or a hotel or road side tea stall any where one would find Imran closely followed, and discussed with devotion.

Meeting personally, William finds Imran to be a good natured personality who possessed all the guts of the international figure and the most coveted young man of his land. When he went to meet him for the first time he had to wait for him as he was busy in saying his prayer i.e. offering ‘Namaz.’

When William expresses surprise to his strict religious practicing of five time offering to Mecca and Friday praying at the Mosque, Imran Khan presents his sensibilities as being the sinner and trying to follow the path led by the Rules of Koran. William puts his figure thus in his typical precise way: “Whatever he gets up to in England, Imran Khan is a Pakistani Muslim at home” (284).

Even he quotes Imran on his own divided lifestyle:
I suppose I like a bit of both life styles. I spend summer in England seeing my friends—ten appointments a day—then come home to Pakistan in winter. Time slows down. I get mobbed if I go into the streets, so my life here is private, I have close circle of friends who see a lot of, but I hardly ever go out. I’m very shy. I get awkward if I’m recognized.(284)

William too nicely summarizes the different traits of Imran’s personality:
Imran is an intriguing compendium of contradictions: extrovert and crippling shy, openly arrogant yet disarmingly modest, austere and sensual, jet-set yet oddly primitive. He can switch one persona to another with remarkable ease. (284)

From his close contacts with Imran William points out Imran’s personality traits such as:

1). The cricketer
2). The gossip-column boy
3). The pious Muslim
4). The oxford graduate with coherent political views
And,
5). The writer.

Dalrymple also talks about his experiences with other facets of Imran’s personality i.e. Imran: the Afghan Pathan, the staunch follower of the sooth-sayer, and the lover of hunting. Dalrymple travels with Imran to the tribal area at Mohammed
ud-Din’s palace, where he witnesses along with the lavish luxuries, the wild play of weapons. Everyone present over there including the host and Imran too were concerned with the weapons and as William puts forward his western logic that it was not at all healthy from any point of view to allow easy availability of the weapons in the private hands, only to be scoffed at by the host with his unique logic:

You Westerner are always telling us this. But for poor people tribal system is very good. In the settled area of Pakistan there is much violence….In Pakistan you can kill a man in broad daylight and if you have the money you can buy justice. But with the tribal law rich men and poor men are equal. You cannot buy the tribal council—you pay with your neck. (291)

Two years later, Imran retired from cricket and married to an English lady Jemima. This created great tremors in Britain and Pakistan too, which was followed by Imran’s raising and for his cancer hospital. And exactly after that, he founded his own political party with the high ideals of cleansing Pakistani government and public life from the creeping corruption- Tehrik-e-Insaf (Justice Movement). When in 1996, Imran mobilizes his political party for the general Elections in Pakistan; Dalrymple again visits Pakistan to cover Imran’s campaigning.

Dalrymple closely follows Imran’s massive single handed campaign mission which succeeds in drawing unprecedented crowd to his meetings, blocking the roads and jamming the traffic. Imran too in the style of a seasoned statesman doesn’t miss any chance to bring out the wreckages of the political system. At one such public meeting, Imran appeals to the massive crowd:

For fifty years the politicians have been exploiting the people of Pakistan. They have been looting and plundering the country! The thief protects thief. We want to bring the plunderers to justice! We will hang the corrupt! The people of Pakistan should unite to achieve their cause. (295)

Dalrymple makes it clear at the very outset that though Imran Khan might have been pulling the crowds, there was no assurance all these crowds being translated into vote, as the Justice movement of Imran Khan wanted to win elections only on the ideals, whereas in reality votes could be translated by handing over bribes to the voters prior to elections.

Everyone even around Imran had sympathies for him but they all too had doubts as they knew the real temperament of the Pakistani voters. The chief argument at Imran's impractical grounds was Imran himself was an Oxford graduate and had all the celebrity life, and out of his mind's frenzy he had stared off to bring a political revolution in Pakistan. People also speculated that as Imran had recommended and
made statements supporting the 'Shariya-Law’ people might choose him as their leader.

Dalrymple also refers to the shedding of blood and feudal murders as the inevitable evils of Pakistani political power games. In the tribal areas it added to the merit of a person if he had murdered his enemies. These Zamindars are the sub-governing agencies who work out parallel governing in their areas and claim to own the people. The idea of their strong hold of the constituencies gets clear by the remark of one of the political commentator puts to Dalrymple: “In some constituencies, if the feudal put up their dog as a candidate, that dog would get elected with 99 per cent of the vote” (298).

Dalrymple also makes it a point from his observations that it was an untold qualification one had to belong to Zamindars' family in order to join Pakistani Politics. As Imran himself relates his experience at one of Zmindars:

One area we went to, a land owner's wife entertained us. She was trying to impress us, and over tea she remarked, “My husband is a very powerful man around here. Do you know he had eight hundred people killed last year?” (305)

Dalrymple also brings in the real impression of the Pakistani government and labeling Pakistan as the marked state for its corruption by the several international agencies. And in the 'Postscript' to this essay notes that though Imran did not get physically assassinated in his political venture, his party Tehreek-e-Insaff could not even win a single seat. Still,

‘His (Imran's) party has, however, succeeded in putting the issue of corruption into the centre of Pakistani political debate, no small achievement in a country which has become so inured to the dishonesty and venality of its politicians....” (312).

On the Frontier

Peshawar, 1989

On the frontier is the essay narrating William Dalrymple’s exploration of the North–West frontier of Pakistan. At the very outset, William makes it clear as he experiences over there that though the area might technically be the part of Pakistani territories; it has nothing to do with the Pakistani Government. The country’s Administrative or Legal powers retained no effectiveness, but rather the area was dominated by the Tribal groups which operated their reigns ++among the people with
their unique tribal conventional laws, rules and regulations. The prosperity of the area, Dalrymple notes, makes its way through the drug trafficking. The valley has also protected many Historical monuments which bring History alive to Dalrymple’s visions.

Violence is to the North-West Frontier what religion to Vatican. It is a raison d’etre, a way of life, an obsession a philosophy. Bandoliers hang over the people’s shoulders; grenades are tucked into their pockets. Status symbols here are not Mercedes or Servile Row suits; in Peshawar you know you have arrived when you can drive to work in a captured Russian T-72 Tank. (313)

Quoting reasons for people’s obsession for weaponries, Dalrymple holds the region’s geographical conditions responsible. Secondly, he observes genetic varieties as displayed in the physiology of the people moving around and makes a guessing that as the region is on the strategic pass of the meeting place of the different continents there must be the mixture of Persians, Arabs, Turks, Moghuls, Sikhs, British, Russians—“…they retain the mixture of arrogance and suspicion that this history has produced their character.” Dalrymple also notes the fact that the violence and profusion of weapons in the private hands that there is no guarantee to safety and that is why he makes it clear:

The tribal areas are officially closed to all foreigners, as their safety cannot be guaranteed by the Pakistan government: kidnapping and murder are so frequent here that they are virtually cottage industries. **To visit you have to smuggle yourself quietly across the tribal border, ideally in the company of some tribal older.** (314) [Emphasis mine]

Having arrived into the market place of Darra Adam Khel, a place just over the border in Tribal territory, Dalrymple is astonished to witness a free-sale market of the deadly weapons, his shocking surprise nicely get translated into the pictorial description he makes of the landscape:

..lines of high-explosive warheads sit in glass cupboards facing on to the streets as innocently as jars of humbugs in as English village store. The stacked mortar shells and the anti-tank ammunition are available over the counter, for cash, as if they were tins of Heinz backed beans. Nearby the belts of machine-gun bullets are hung up like strings of onions. Outside, left lying around the streets like so much discarded gardening equipment can be found heavy machine-guns. (314)

Dalrymple also collects information about the prospective buyers of these weapons. He is informed even the lower middle-class person would equip himself
with two-to-four medium sized artilleries and one-or two big ones. He was also said
that the Afghan war was also secured good bossiness for the traders of the weapons,
and that now it being over the local tribesmen did the purchase in order to meet their
regular needs.

Besides the astonishing trades of the weapons, another lucrative source of
revenue for the local people was the illicit trade of drug. Dalrymple goes to the visit
of such center of opium trade, Lindy Khotal, though it was no free from risk of losing
life. He describes the availability of the variety of narcotics in this area just as day
today use commodities in other parts of world:

Landi Khotal was awash with narcotics. Heroine itself was generally kept out
of sight under the counter, but hashish and opium were freely available and as
casually displayed as cigarettes and betel nut. Some of the hash was set in
great toffee-like blocks; other pieces were folded into hash chapattis or
toutured into spaghetti strands. One roadside stall mouldsed its hash into
curvilinear arrangements that looked like liquorices allsorts. (322)

In the talks with one of the locals Dalrymple finds the results of the
rehabilitation of the illicit trade of the narcotics, as the local person told him that the
wells built with the US funding at the promise of leaving this trade and replacing the
crops, is now used to produce better quality opium.

Another trade of the place is the smuggled goods market which might be
ranked among the biggest ones in Asia. Here the smuggled goods from all the Asian
countries are easily available.

Exploring the Valley of Swat River, Dalrymple comes across the ruins of
Monastic complexes. What atttrects his attention is the perfect European architecture of
this structures. This gives him the chance to expose the facts from historical
happenings. Here, he enacts the history of Alaxander the great i.e. how Alexander
defeated the Hindu Rajah of Swat and hearing about the fairy-tale like stories about
India’s riches he ordered his platoons to march further towards India. But
unfortunately, scared by the monsoon rains on the swollen banks of Beas, his
homesick troops denied to go further, and suspending his ideas of marching further,
he returned to Greeek, leaving his conquered lands in charge of his Greek garrisons.
When Alexander died or perhaps murdered on his return journey to Greece, whole of
his conquered lands split into million pieces. The greek garrisons in India and
Afghanistan had no choice in this anarchy but to stay back and get rooted to the places
where they were placed:
They had no choice but to stay on in Asia, intermingling with the local peoples and leavening Indian learning with Greek philosophy and classical ideas. Over the following thousand years, further cross-fertilised by Central Asian influences brought by conquering Kushans, an astounding civilization grew up in the fastness of the Karakorums, deep within the isolated and mountaneous kingdom known as Ghadhar. Hellenic in spirit, Buddhist in religion, worshipping an encyclopedic pantheon of Greek, Roman, Iranian, Hindu and Buddhist deities, Gandhara’s principal icon was a meditating Buddha dressed in a Greek toga. (325)

Another site which exhibits the petals of golden era of the Gandhar kingdom is Pushkalvaati, the city of lotus. Dalrymple visits it and his historic interests make him wonder the grandeur of the monuments:

It was like entering a lost world, a forgotten Eden isolated on its high Himalayan plateau.

Everywhere you looked were the undecayed remains of the Gandharan golden age: colossal Buddhas and reliefs of the Kushan King Kanishka cut into the rockface; huge stupas rising from hexagonal drums; and a series of fortresses sitting on vast bluffs of rock overlooking the old Silk Road. (329)

The next site he visits is Taxila, Gandhara’s ancient city at the Malakand Pass. Dalrymple visiting the site once again opens pages of History. Alexander stayed at this place and the king of Taxila preferred instead of entering into clash with Alexander’s army made a treaty and guided them into this mountainous area. The architecture of the buildings and the images of Buddha too exhibit strong influence of the western world:

At Sirkap on the edge of Taxila, the Bactrian Greeks founded a classical Greek quarter in 190 BC. It was to be new Taxila, a great advance on the old city, and they carefully laid out the streets in a grid of straight lines, like a chess board. As Athens, a magnificent boundary wall loops around the residential areas and rises up to the fortified citadel, Sirkap’s answer to the Parthenon. (331)

Another thing that arrests his attention is the insignia of the double-headed eagle: “Most intriguing of all, one of the shrines bears the same symbol was to become the crest first of Byzantium, then of the Habsburgs, and finally of Imperial Russia. Its first appearance, here in a lost city on the edge of Karakorum’s, is one of Gandhara’s great unsolved mysteries” (331).
Dalrymple’s observant eyes capture the centuries’ long continuity of the same culture in the region. He notes the sculptors of these monuments have inscribed the minutest details of the surrounding lives in the carvings; and the same details are still found in the modern traces of lives unchanged and intact:

The writing tablet and reed pen which the Buddha uses are still used in the more remote frontier primary schools. The turbans which the Gandharan chieftains sported in the sixth century AD. have yet to disappear, and many of the tribesmen dye their beards, just as they did when Nearcys wandered through the streets of Taxila in the third century B.C. the sandals of the Bodhisattvas are still worn; their musical instruments still played; their jewellery still manufactured in the silver bazaar today. Even the design of the houses remains more or less unchanged by the passage of time. (333)

The images of Buddha in the museum remind Dalrymple of the expression worn by the Pathan clan outside in the market, another form of continuity:

Hawk eyed, eagle beaked, they are a proud people; and as the Buddhas demonstrate, their poise and self confidence directly reflect that of the Gandharan Bectarian Greeks who sculpted these images in the plains of Peshawar nearly two millennia ago. (334)

The entire piece exhibits Dalrymple’s consummate cutch of the art, his narration sweeps between past and present, sometimes picking the present landscape in view and very interestingly turning to the past glories of histories and trying to seek links between this past and present. The issues of blood feuds and revenge murders are nicely woven with the histories of Alexander, and the ancient kingdom of Gandhara and its Buddhist monuments.

**Blood on the Tracks**

**LAHORE, 1997**

This essay enacts the story of the most disturbing chapter of the Continent’s history, viz. the Partition massacre of India-Pakistan. Dalrymple opens the essay by narrating the wonderful miracle effected by the Britishers’ massive investment in the continent; The Railways.

Dalrymple notes the Railways founded by the Britishers in India in the wake of industrialization was the greatest investment: “It was the biggest, and most costly,
construction project undertaken by any colonial power in any colony anywhere in the world. It was also the largest single investment of British capital in the whole of the nineteenth century” (338).

William Dalrymple makes a historical observation in connection to the railways in Indian sub-continent that it not only revolutionized the travelling activities of the people but in also affected a social revolution as it created a room which was free from the century long class consciousness; more particularly it was the place where anyone could purchase the ticket and occupy his/her place without being curbed into the class system. Secondly, it was the railway that made travelling faster and that brought the extremely diversified culture together and planted to it the consciousness of oneness, a feeling like nationalism…. And due to this facts Dalrymple goes to the extent of passing a judgment like statement:

Moreover, as journey times shrank, India became aware of itself for the first time as a single unified nation. As the bullock cart gave way to the locomotive, a subcontinent disjointed by vast distances and primeval communications suddenly, for the first time, became aware of itself as a single geographical unit. It was the railways that made India a nation. (339) [Emphasis mine]

Just as the British introduction: the railways made and created its whirls of change into the lives of Indians, Dalrymple notes, the Indians too had their own treatment to offer to the railways, see how he notes it in his typical style: 

Just as India has always seduced and transformed its conquerors, so in the same way it slowly took over and indigenized the railways. Soon the stations were inhabited by whole villages of people washing, sleeping and cooking in the ticket halls, arriving days early for a train and building encampments on the platforms. Within few years something quintessentially English had been forever transformed into something quintessentially Indian. (341)] [Emphasis mine]

And,

The hierarchy of the railways seemed directly to echo the Hindu caste system, with a pyramid that rose, rank after rank, from the lowly armies of sweepers through the parcel clerks, goods clerks, booking clerks and special ticket examiners to the twice-born apex of stationmaster and general manager. For the Muslims too, there may have been something appealing in submission to a railway timetable at once as merciful, omnipotent and lofty inflexible as the great Koran itself.(341)
Dalrymple also notes that the Lahore Railway Station had been the most calculated construction as Lahore lied on the nearest destination from the Khyber Pass--- in case of the possible invasion from the Russian Army, it could be transformed into a colossal Bunker, with its sliding roofs and tricky masonry works.. Though the station never had to be transformed into a “fortified bunker” in order to evade any outside invasion, it witnessed excessive bloodshed, as any monument at the war frontiers, at the time of the great unfortunate event of Partition.

He presents the accounts of the Partition Massacres to how the trains loaded with the dead bodies crossed the new born frontiers. The stationmaster of Lahore station, Khawajah Bilal, narrated to Dalrymple exactly what happened on 14th August, 1947:

On 14 August I was on duty. We heard an announcement that Partition had taken place. Soon after that the killing started, the slaughter began. Everywhere we looked we saw carnage and destruction of human life. There was no law and order, even when the soldiers came and made the barricade with the barbed wire outside the station. Despite their presence, many were being killed---on the platforms, on the bridges, in the ticket halls. There were stabbings, rapes, attempts at arson. I had my charpoy in my stationmaster’s office: I didn’t dare to go back to my house. But at night I could not sleep because of the screams and moans of dying coming from the platform. In the morning, when the light came, bodies would be lying everywhere. (344)

The episode might record millions of such painful stories, who survived this nightmarish event in the continent’s history. Like many other stories of the corpus of partition literature, William’s essay too presents the plight of carnage and tries to voice individual tragedies parallel to the mass destruction and draws the concluding note that:

Listening `to these horror stories, it was clear that for the people of India and Pakistan the horrors of partition were not just the stuff of history, consigned to the memories of a few old men; for most people they were still livid scars, unhealed wounds which were still poisoning relation between Hindu and Muslims, India and Pakistan, half a century later. (345)
This essay presents before us Dalrymple’s reflections on Pakistani First ever lady Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and prepares a nice word picture of this stateswoman whose life and personality remains a butt of attraction and attention not only for the people of Pakistan but in the West too for many a political interests. The phrase, “Mills & Boon” in the title itself makes it clear that Benazir has got her strong roots in the West and ‘the West’ knows it very well too. Dalrymple’s interests in her too churn the points how this lady tries to come true to her dreams and tackles the tough situations through which sometimes she need to make steep choices between the near and dears or the political legacy of her father. In her conversations with Dalrymple, as he notes, she emerges with multi-facet personality—a responsible daughter who incessantly toils to take further the political legacy of her father, a glamorous lady who has her strong hold in the hearts of Pakistani public, a mother, a daughter of a widowed mother with whom she shares many misunderstandings, and above all the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Dalrymple has enough evidences to prove why Benazir is a favoured political personality in the West, still in Pakistan among the people her own strategies of political lead have not found any sound moldings. For the West she is a fond persona as she presents the image of a liberalized leader and has no scorns for the Western countries and does not issue ‘fatavah’ against the West. Her accession to the premiere position still could not bring out any radical or impactful landmarks. As Dalrymple is addressing the western audience on this issue, he makes this unconsciously clear in the comment:

There is no doubt that Pakistanis are, on the whole, grateful to Benazir Bhutto for bringing back democracy, and that many regard her as a brave and impressive woman. But the fact remains that they have never felt as enthusiastic about her as WE in the West would sometimes like to believe.

(350) [Emphasis mine] (The emphasis tries to emboss the west-centric approach of the narrator)
Dalrymple also brings to the light Benazir’s Thatcher-like use of Royal ‘we’, and also the style of her speech during the interview being ‘unstoppable’ just like Lady Thatcher whom she frequently cited as her ‘Role Model’.

For India Benazir holds the typical Pakistani views and on the issue of the murders of the separatists Kashmiries on the Indian side appears to her the atrocious handling.

Dalrymple digs deep into the family strife from the either sides. The issues of sending her brother Murtaza to jail and her alleged ordering the police to open fire on the camp of her mother and brother’s supporters on at the grave site of Bhutto on the Birthday of the “Shaheed”, have aggravated the relations between the family members and the family has been divided into two hostile camps. To the question of Dalrymple Benazir nicely replies that seeing his children contesting election against each other and fighting an open battle, their father would surely have been greatly pained. Benazir’s mother Begum Nusrat Bhutto has also her grave complaints against her daughter who, according to her, has lost her sense of proportion in the blind race of obtaining power and aptly cites the Western proverb in her connection, “Power corrupts and more power corrupts even more.”

In the post script to the essay William describes the murder of Murtaza at Clifford and Murtaza’s widowed wife, Ghinwa Bhutto and her step daughter, Fatima taking the reins of Murtaza’s PPP- Shaheed Bhutto faction and leading a massive campaign against Benazir. William concludes the results of such campaigns and the facts of the massive corruption charges leveled against Benazir and her husband Zardari, ‘Mr. Ten Percent’, in the general election of 1997, Benazir’s party could not perform well and had to remain satisfied being the largest opposition.

Nine years after publication of this book, on 27 December 2007, while Benazir Bhutto was campaigning for her party for upcoming General Elections (scheduled on January, 2008), she was attacked by gun-shots as well as a suicide-bomb and was assassinated. As per the details of the incident, as she was coming out after addressing a political rally at the Liaquat Bagh, a close gun firing was opened on her and immediately after that a suicide-bomb detonated at very close to the spot injuring her fatally. After the corruption charges and several court cases, Bhutto had taken self exile spending eight years in Dubai and London and had returned only for the upcoming General Elections and had escaped same attempt two months earlier soon after her arrival while, on 18 October 2007, she was en route to a rally in Karachi, two explosions occurred shortly after she had landed and left.

As per the causes of the assassination so many debates and theories have been
mounted but till date it remains the murder mystery. As Griff Witte observed in his article in The Washington Post, dated 29 December 2007, titled “Masses Mourn Bhutto as Unrest Spreads”: “the crime scene was cleared before any forensic examination could be completed and no formal autopsy was performed before burial. Despite the ambiguity surrounding her death, Bhutto's husband Mr Asif Zardari did not allow a formal autopsy to be conducted citing his fears regarding the procedure being carried out in Pakistan. Due to which, even today the true cause of her death remains uncertain.”

On the whole Dalrymple has presented and captured the plight of the entire social and political ruts of life in Pakistan in these four essays. This decade of nineties has witnessed a great political upheaval in Pakistan too, along with the neighboring nation India. There are trends now among people of Pakistan where undercurrents for justice and equality are voiced in public and media too. Another point that can be noted is the presence and the close following of the Western nations of this part. The West is present in the forms of Diplomats, Tourists or the Journalists who record the slightest tremors of public life in this part of the earth. Dalrympl’s historic scholarship attracts and arrests his attention towards the ruinous monuments in the Swat valley dating back to the time of Alexander the great.
Works Cited


