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Travel writing is a genre of literature which has flourished through the ages. From Homer's The Odyssey to Herodotus' The Histories, travel narratives have existed for thousand of years as a fundamental and enticing style of writing. Throughout history, the idea of travel and travel writing has always fascinated and lured human beings. But today it has become central stage and has assumed a completely new significance as it brings various cultures face to face. Traditionally, travel writing is adopted as an important source of historiography. History itself is a kind of travel. In some way or the other, all history writings deal with the travel accounts. It not only provides information about the place but also gives a valuable insight into the history as well as culture of the people. The text City of Djinnns by William Dalrymple is one such mixture of travel and history. This paper will interpret the travelogue City of Djinnns as a blend of past and present. It will examine the text in the light of ever-changing faces of Delhi and how the author uncovers the city's history backwards in time while embedded in the present.

**Keywords:** Travel Writing, History, Delhi, William Dalrymple, Past and Present.

\[\text{History is a prophet who looks back: because of what was and against what was, it announces what will be. (Galeano 8)}\]

Travel literature is a form of non-fiction in which the narrator's encounter with foreign places acts as a dominant subject. Over many centuries, travel has been an integral part of human life. The reason behind travel can be diverse but pilgrimage, business, migration, missionary activities, search for job, food and educational opportunities have been the common motives behind foreign travels. Travel Writing as a literary genre has acquired great popularity with the passage of time probably because of its various approaches towards history, geography, literature, journalism, post-colonial studies, and anthropology. According to Hulme, Travel Writing has "four near neighbours, in generic terms: the novel (literature), ethnography (anthropology), the document (history), and reportage sociology" (5). Casey Banton says that Travel Writing is a "vehicle whose main purpose is to introduce us to the other" (xi) and this search for "the other" has taken many forms like autobiography, reportage, historical-narrative or a combination of all.
Because of this multidisciplinary nature, travel writing has developed a close relationship with history. Since earlier times travel accounts have been used as a valuable source of history. The role of travel writing has been vital in understanding faraway lands that have been erased with the passage of time and space. Travel writing has the power to reproduce history as Lisle Debbie rightly points out in *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*:

> All travelogues are based on a journey metaphor that expresses the common affliction of wanderlust - the need to go elsewhere... since the beginning of written and recorded history, the journey metaphor has been central to the way peoples and cultures locate themselves and tell stories about the world they are living in. (36)

Travel accounts can help the historian in many ways. The travellers generally provide such information which the local people ignore as being ordinary. Travel accounts are important not only because they are windows on distant places but also because they are mirrors that reflect the value of the travellers and throw back light on their own societies (Anjum 196). Dalrymple has created a style that combines travel and historical writing. His text *City of Djinns* is part-travel and part-history. The “book is shaped like a novel” which has history at the centre. *City of Djinns* is his second book which was published in 1993. This book won him the 1994 Thomas Cook Travel Book Award and Sunday Times Young British Writer of the Year Award. After this book he became the world’s most renowned and established travel writer.

Dalrymple is greatly fascinated by India and in an interview with Anand Raj OK he says: “as a writer and a reporter I find there’s a deep well of subjects to write about, whole worlds to explore in India and its neighbouring countries, subjects my contemporaries in many places can only dream of” (n.pag.).

Delhi is the capital and one of the most important cities of India. Its history is as rich and vast as the city itself. It is the city of mystery, splendid past and full of the layers of captivating history. In *City of Djinns*, Dalrymple calls Delhi “a city whose different ages lay suspended side by side as in a spic” (CD 9). *City of Djinns* is an outcome of Dalrymple’s one year stay in Delhi. His love for Delhi started with his arrival in the sub-continent when he was eighteen years old. He came as a backpacker in 1984 and never left the country. His first encounter left him “dumb folded” and “hocked by India and Indian History” (Nayar).

In the prologue to *City of Djinns* he admits his fascination towards the capital and says, “from the very beginning I was mesmerized by the great capital, so totally unlike anything I had ever seen before” (CD 7). *City of Djinns* was written after five years, on his second visit to India. But the idea for writing on Delhi came to his mind much earlier when he says “In Delhi I had found a theme for a book” (CD 9). The title is the perfect description of Delhi. “Delhi, said Pir Sadr-ud-Din, was a city of djinns. Though it had been burned by invaders time and time again, millennium after millennium, still the city was rebuilt, each time it rose like a phoenix from the fire... but the djinns loved Delhi so much they could never bear to see it empty or deserted” (CD 9).
In *City of Djinns* William encompasses travel, history and autobiography in order to articulate his chief concern that is uncovering the different layers of Delhi's past. He uses a unique method to unravel Delhi's history. He goes backwards in time and history to review the evolution of Delhi. Relationship with the past has been brought out through a series of stories and characters encountered by William Dalrymple. He takes his readers on a journey to the historical events that occurred in the past. To peel off the layers of Delhi's past he adopts a reverse chronological order. The year mentioned in the sub-title, he admits, is a "notional year" that represents a compressed version of what was in fact "about four years" in which he "spiral[s] down in the history of Delhi" (Youngs 41-42). In an interview with Tim Youngs he states his views about the structure of *City of Djinns*, "I devised quite a complicated structure for *City of Djinns*... Each chapter takes you back a stage... It was very difficult to write, particularly putting the history going backwards because often so much of what happens in history is formed by what has happened before it and yet if you're doing it backwards you can't refer to that because the reader doesn't know that... it's a very illogical way of writing about history and yet it works terribly well... The reason for the structure was that the central idea is that Delhi does seem to act like a sort of fly paper on time. Time doesn't seem to have its destructive power in Delhi in the way it does in some other places... and this is what travel books often do - tell the story of the past through bits that are still alive" (42-44).

On his journey towards the past he traverses through the partition of the Indian subcontinent to anti-sikh riots, the British Raj and Indian independence and then to the Mughal history and finally he comes to the epical world of *Mahabharata*, which records the foundation of the city. By moving deeper into the history of Delhi he also gives the accounts of journey made by Ibn-Battuta - a Morrocan traveller, who served under Tughluq Khan.

Dalrymple makes alluring observations on past as well as present. He juxtaposes each past event with a present situation. The narrative shifts among various time limits, from distant past to more recent history and frequently connects to the present setting. The text's fluctuation between past and present is well illustrated in Chapter Six of the book which is divided into nine sections. The narrative starts in the present with the account of the New Year party. The second section constructs the setting of the Mughal Empire during the late seventeenth century. The reader journeys into the past with the help of historical details related to the political career of Safdarjung, Nawab of Avadh. This part connects to the description of Safdarjung's tomb in old Delhi. The third section describes the patridge fight that Dalrymple goes to see with taxi-driver Balvinder Singh and his father Punjab Singh. In the fourth section there is a detailed review of Dargah Quli Khan’s eighteenth century account *Muraqqa'-e-Dehil*.

Dalrymple adopts a distanced stance while narrating history in *City of Djinns*. He does not give his own opinions and judgements on the past and present. Rather, he does it through the characters whom he encounters. Each
aspect is presented and substantiated by the personal accounts of the people who suffered. For example, the story of Sikh riots has been told through his taxi-driver, Mr. and Mrs. Puri and Schan Singh Sandhu, 1984 riots survivor. He gives first-hand accounts of the people and their experiences. The harrowing experiences of partition are shown by Mrs. Seth, Punjab Singh and Puris. He reflects on the sad events of partition. "Partition was the last great conflagration... it was the greatest migration the modern world had ever seen. Yet again Delhi was consigned to the flames... Delhi was transformed from a small administrative capital of 900,000 people to a Punjabi-speaking metropolis half the size of London" (CD 36). Dalrymple tries to find survivors of each historical event he takes up. He remarks, "All the different ages of man were represented in the people of the city. Different millennia co-existed side by side" (CD 9).

His narrative uncovers many layers of Delhi and while describing the British Raj in India his accent towards the British surfaces. While writing, Dalrymple has a specific reader in mind which he acknowledges in an interview with Sanjay Austa. When asked, "Do your books cater to a particular audience?" He replies, "I write for the British audience. It demonstrates in how much I explain..." (n.pag.). His nostalgic longing for the imperial history of the British in India is evident as he acknowledges in the text: "Before I went to India I went to Cambridge to see a friend of my grandmother. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, Iris Portal's Youth had been spent in that colonial Delhi that seemed so impossibly dated" (CD 75).

At the end of interview, Dalrymple asks, "Do you think British rule was justified" (CD 80). This assertion of Dalrymple reveals his preconceived notions and chief interest to justify the British presence in India. His imperialist nostalgia is visible when he meets the last of the residents of the British Empire in India. He records their impressions of the British Empire and Delhi. They long for the British India and say, "Oh it was fun. We were young and blonde and had admirers... at night we went to dances and drank champagne... Those were the days" (CD 88). Here Dalrymple tries to show that India at the time of British was better than the present. Dalrymple's representation of history is mostly archival. His extensive research into library, information gleaned from unpublished documents and intertextual references to travel accounts from previous as well as modern writers makes his research original. Therefore, his travel narrative is formed by bringing together factual evidence from historical sources, uncommon or unpublished manuscripts, photographs and book. Above all, the information accumulated by interacting with people is frequently cited and gives depth to the narrative structure.

Travel writing presents a unique perspective to history for the reader. It offers "an embedded and local point of view as an alternative to the grand narratives and their perspectives on the same history" (Stubbs vii). As per German philosopher Hegel, "the term History unites the objective with the subjective side and denotes... not less what has happened than the narration of what has happened" (60). Accordingly the historian selects and interprets facts and then builds a narrative, which extends beyond the literal context of historical facticity. Hayden,
William Dalrymple's Travelogue City...

White uses the term 'narrativized' for such construction and emphasizes that it has the form of a story. He describes the difference between a historical discourse that "opens up a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it, and a discourse that seeks to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story" (qtd. in Keen 121). As a travel writer, Dalrymple engaged this 'narrativily' to construct a setting and evoke characters and events from different time periods emphasizing the distinctive historical and cultural context which defines them" (Rahim 61).

Dalrymple convinces the reader into believing the initial years of Delhi as prosperous and flourishing, while the present is somewhat subdued. Architectural importance of Delhi is another aspect to represent different phases of Delhi's history. A close focus is on the Mughal and British structures. To bring forth the architectural significance of the past, he visited many historic sites. He visits Red Fort with Dr. Jaffery and describes it as:

The Red Fort is to Delhi what the Colosseum is to Rome or the Acropolis to Athens: it is the single most famous monument in the city. It represents the climax of more than six hundred years of experimentation in palace building by Indo-Islamic architects, and is by far the most substantial monument - and its day was also by far the most magnificent - that the Mughals left behind them in Delhi. (CD 217)

He considers haveli - "a world within a world, self-contained and totally hidden from the view of the casual passer-by" (CD 55) and Mughal Tykhana as "a known piece of history" (CD 56). The condition of Chandini Chowk is the greatest disappointment for Dalrymple in Delhi. He compares the glorious past with the stagnant present of Chandini Chowk. He glorifies the past by saying:

In the poems and travelogues, the Moonlight Bazaar is praised as a kind of Oriental Faubourg St Honoré, renowned for its wide avenues, its elegant caravan-series and its fabulous Mughal gardens... you expect to see strings of Bactrian camels from Keshgar and logs of Cinnamon from Madagascar, merchants from Fergana, and Khmer girl concubines from beyond the Irrawaddy; perhaps even a rare breed of turkey from the New World or a zebra to fill the Imperial menagerie and amuse the Emperor. (CD 54)

Dalrymple juxtaposes Chandni Chowk's past with present, which represents a sad picture of neglect and decay. He points out that:

As you sit stranded in a traffic jam, half choked by rickshaw fumes... you see around you a sad vista of collapsing shop fronts and broken balustrades, tatty warehouses roofed with corrugated iron and patched with rusting duckboards... All is tarnished, fraying at the edge. (CD 54)

Dalrymple writes that "It was the ruins in and around India's capital that fascinated me. I kept imagining all the history lying buried there". Sen categorizes three different approaches that are adopted by outsiders to understand and interpret the Indian Subcontinent:

...the first (exoticist) category concentrates on the wondrous aspects of India. The focus here is on what is different, what is strange in the country
that as Hegel put it, "has existed for millennia in the imagination of the Europeans." The second (magisterial) category strongly relates to the exercise of imperial power and sees India as a subject territory from the view of its British governors. This outlook assimilates a sense of superiority and guardianship... The third (curatorial) category is the most catholic of the three and includes various attempts at noting, classifying and exhibiting diverse aspects of Indian culture... as very special and extraordinarily interesting." (142)

Dalrymple due to its "engagement with the social and aesthetic world of the subcontinent" (Rahim 27) falls in third category. Dalrymple closes the book by devoting it to the great Hindu epic, Mahabharata, which chronicles the foundation of Delhi's history. He throws light on the importance of Mahabharata in the lives of the Hindus and draws a comparison of Maharabhata with its "equivalents" in the west. He states, "... the Odyssey, Beowulf or the Nibelungenlied - have died out and are only remembered now by the most bookish of scholars, the story of Mahabharata is still common property of every Hindu in the subcontinent." (CD 321). The extensive research and the historical approach towards the subject of the book brings Delhi in a new light. Dalrymple tries everything to bring Delhi's past to life. Even within the text Delhi is viewed from various perspectives. In the words of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "New Delhi is the visible symbol of British power, with all its ostentation and wasteful extravagance" (CD 85). An old British citizen who lived in Delhi at the time of independence British colonization: "... I think you must never take land away from a people. A people's land has a mystique..." The writer of the Muraqqa-e-Delhi, which is an absorbing eighteenth century account of the city, "saw Delhi as a vibrant and sophisticated city, full of glamour and intrigue..." (CD 165). But in contrast, as Dalrymple points out, "modern Delhi is thought of either as a city of grey bureaucracy, or as the metropolis of hard-working, 'nouveau-riche' Punjabis. It is rarely spoken of as a lively city..." (CD 176).

Thus the reader is left with the impression that Delhi is a melange of various aspects. Through the discovery of the tale of William Fraser, one of the just scots to have ruled Delhi as a Nawab, Dalrymple finds an ancestral link between William Fraser and his wife Olivia. Apart from his personal link to Delhi, Dalrymple also finds his own attitude changing in the course of his journey. By the end of his visit he is completely in awe of a sprawling city, rich in its ethnic diversity and culture, and the physical journey of exploring the city is thus transformed into a travel through the varying states of mind of the author, the reader and even the people of Delhi. Alongwith juxtaposition of past and present, Dalrymple also uncovers what has survived over the centuries. Dalrymple's narrative thus carries the reader on an amazing ride through fine nuances. His clever blend of past and present, and his structured, coherent and amusing style of writing enhance his exploration of a city that is as amusing and lively as the narrative that encases it. Thus, Dalrymple while contrasting past and the present persuades his readers
into believing that the initial years of Delhi were prosperous and flourishing whereas the present is somewhat suppressed and degenerated.

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