



Chapter 6

NINE LIVES

IN SEARCH OF SCARED IN MODERN INDIA

Nine Lives

Nine Lives: In Search of Sacred in Modern India weaves the 'sacred' in the texture of the book for which India has been spearheading for the time ancient. William Dalrymple tries to locate this 'Religious' temperament of the Indian generations even in the full speed development of the nation from all view points of modern developments. The very title of the book makes the focus of the author well nigh clear: '*In Search of Sacred in **Modern** India*' (Emphasis mine); through this the author tries to inspect into the matter how ardently and with what intensity the religious matters are observed among the Indian social circles while the whole scenario of the national social and economic fronts is undergoing a beat of transformation under the globalization and liberalization issues. Dalrymple has followed a well defined framework in the planning of the book. Even after the publication of it; he led and staged shows and demonstrations to make the things heard about the book and invested ample efforts to popularize his crafted creation. Published in 2009 in multiple editions, the book secured attention of world community and literary circles and has bagged a couple of awards. The heritage of India is the heritage of sacredness. There are thousands of religious traditions alive and co-exist in the forming the several spectrum strips of society. This is perhaps the typicality that fixes the visitors' attention without fail; of which William Dalrymple is no exception.

In the last decades of twentieth century, Indian culture and society has undergone and absorbed massive transforming influences on all the domains, say, be it the economical, social, political, commercial or the field of infrastructural developments. Everywhere there is a boost of and wave of betterment. The speed with which the landscape is changing appears quite unimaginable. In the very introduction of *Nine Lives*, William Dalrymple captions: "Living in India over last few years, I have seen the country change at a rate that was impossible to imagine. The speed of development is breath taking to any one used to the plodding growth rates of Western Europe: the sort of construction that would take twenty-five years in Britain comes up in five month" (Dalrymple. *Nine Lives* Xii).

At the same time, there are sites and scenes--- especially on the Rural Side which have remained outside the umbrella of the developments and infrastructural

advancements. Dalrymple, being the outsider, catches this conspicuous contrast and makes it a point that the drive of ten to twenty minutes on the highway past any metro city, the landscape is replaced with serenity, simplicity and natural flora and fauna in their original unaltered form. Here, the question: how India manages to balance such fast-swift developments on one facet and the exactly opposite to it, the calm and serene traditional rut of life on the other? This very sanctum of fact rivets Dalrymple's attention and forms the very foundation of the book. Dalrymple's travels in this subcontinent have made him face-to-face with many such magnificent and fascinating life-styles and life-holding beliefs. There exists a miraculous harmony between these exactly occult and opposing forces. Dalrymple himself voices his surprise to such variety thus:

Yet to my surprise, for all the changes and development that have taken place, an older India endures, and many of the issues that I found my holy men discussing and agonizing about remained the same eternal quandaries that absorbed the holy men of classical India or the Sufis of the middle ages, hundreds of years ago: the quest for material success and comfort against the claims of the life of the spirit; the call of the life of action against the life of contemplation; the way of stability against the lure of the open road; personal devotion against conventional or public religion; textual orthodoxy against emotional appeal of mysticism; the age-old war of duty and desire.

The water moves on, a little faster than before, yet still the great river flows. (Dalrymple *Nine Lives* xvii)

The Nun's Tale

In the very first account of *Nine Lives: Search for a sacred India*, William delineates the life story of a Jain Nun who has left the social luxurious life in a quest of supreme truth and graced the life of ascetic codes which even do not allow her to travel by a vehicle, retain any relation with her family or anybody else and expect her to observe total detachment from the mundane world except to remain within it as the flower of lotus exists in the water body, and many other strict code of conducts. William engages himself in prolonged conversations with the Nun and tries to understand how on spiritual path the advancement is achieved through leading such an austere life. The Nun, Prasanmati Mataji, relates in her conversations her personal

choices for the Nun hood, her struggles and progress on the path of attainment of total salvation i.e. 'Moksha'.

In India Jainism has flourished parallel to the Buddhism as a strong reaction to the Brahminical stubborn form of Hinduism. The main principle on which both these philosophies derive inspiration is the principle of 'Ahimsa' i.e. "Non-Violence". The Caste system of Brahminical Hinduism was another strong factor to nourish the cults. The main differences between both the cults are very nominal. The Buddhist monks shave their heads whereas the Jain Monks pluck their hair from the roots, a painful process. The Buddhist monk would beg for his food, whereas the Jains have to have their food without asking.

William presents the historical details regarding two prominent figures of Indian History, whose lives and story have cast really shaping effects to the Indian life; Chandra Gupt Maurya, the first Emperor of India and Prince Bahubali who adopted and accepted the Jain principles being tired of excessive violence. William visits the place of Chandragupta, "It was here, in the third century BC, that the first Emperor of India, Chandragupt Maurya, embraced the Jain religion and died through a self imposed fast to death" (01). The tale of Prince Bahubali also goes in the same line of attainment of victory not over the outer enemies but to be the master of one's own mundane desires and to be liberated from the web of vain honours. Once entering in a duel fight and overpowering his own brother Bharat for getting absolute control over his father's kingdom, Bahubali realized that it was sheer foolishness and greed to crush the weak with his own muscular powers, and renounced at once whatever he won from his brother. According to the Jains, he was the first human being to attain 'Moksha': 'Spiritual Liberation' by conquering the real enemies like passions, ambitions, pride and desires.

William notes that there are two sects of Jainism: Digambara and Svetambara. Actually, the term Digambara is the deviated form of Sanskrit term 'Dik Ambara' i. e. whose clothes are the four direction or who are sky clad and the place 'Sravana Belgeda' is the main centre of faith just as Vatican is for Christianity. The rules in this sect are very severe. The monks of this sect remain completely naked. "They show their total renunciation of the worldlyby travelling through it completely naked, as light as the air, as they conceive it, and as clear as the Indian sky" (02).

The 'Tirthankaras' are the holiest figures in the Jain sects. They are believed to have attained total nirvana and are worshipped as the path guider to the common and ordinary followers. The statues of these 'Tirthankaras': the liberators

to be worshipped, are found erected in the Jain temples. The statues are carved in the cupped hand position, shaven heads and sitting in the 'Virasana Samadhi'.

William first saw the Nun, 'Mataji' in a temple while she was busy with her ritual of prayers. She bowed to each of the figures and prayed them. William's request for meeting or rather in the religious terms 'Darshan', he was granted.

In the conversation with her, William discusses the primary and the basic principles of the Jain philosophy. Mataji also informs him about the special rituals of the cult. One such ritual and the one which she opines to be on the culmination point of any follower's life path is 'Sulekhana': a ritual fast to death. As a Jain Nun she believes it to be the route to 'Nirvana'. Death is not believed as the final event of life, rather it is thought of as a path to get a new life. When asked whether 'Sulekhans' being a kind of suicide, Mataji nicely and with confident arguments explained that the suicide was painful and full of sufferings whereas 'Sulekhana' was a beautiful thing. It is, she explains to William, a planned process and undertaken under the guidance of any senior and experienced 'Mataji' or 'Guru'. The person undertaking it has to leave food one by one day by day.

The word 'Jain' is derived from 'Jina' --- A liberator or the spiritual conqueror. Mataji describes in detail the lineage of twenty four such spiritual conquerors that are ardently adored and worshipped in Jainism. These 'Tirthankars' are those lofty souls who succeeded in discovering the path which would liberate the soul from the eternal cycle of deaths and rebirths.

Mataji also points out the striking differences among the other religions and Jainism. The Jains, she opines, are different from the Hindus and the Buddhists in many ways. They reject the Hindu idea about the creation of this world. They oppose the Brahminical rituals. The most important sacrifice for a Jain is not 'Puja' or ritual but the sacrifice of his/her own body. The Jains conceive 'Karma' as a fine material substance that physically attaches itself to the soul. To gain final liberation, one must live life in a way that stops one accumulating more 'Karma'.

The Jains believe that the soul's journey takes place in the universe in a perfect preconceived pattern. For them, the universe is like a gigantic cosmic human body. "For Jains, the universe is shaped like a gigantic cosmic human body. Above the body is a canopy containing the liberated and perfected souls --- 'Siddhas' --- who, like the 'Tirthankars' have escaped the cycle of rebirths. At the top of the body, level with chest, is the celestial upper world, the blissful home of the Gods they believe the middle world at the waist and the hell below this" (09).

Their belief holds that the reincarnation of the soul in the blissful form of God depends upon the actions and 'Karmas' accumulated by the soul. And therefore the Monks and the Nuns who walk on the path of 'Nirvana' have to follow the austere life full of severe code of conducts. "...the monk and the Nun must embrace the three Jewels, namely 'Right Knowledge', 'Right Faith', and 'Right Conduct', and take five vows: No Violence, No Untruth, No Stealing, No Sex, and No Attachments." (10)

William personally observes the way of life of Mataji. At the breakfast, he notices how indifferently she consumes the food that is offered to her by the ladies. She takes all care not to kill even the tiniest insect or any other living creature. William coins a new term for the process of her food consuming as the "Silent Meal".

In the course of conversation, Mataji talks to William about her social life before she graced the ascetic life. William presents all these details directly from the mouth of Mataji in the first person narration: "I was born in Raipur, Chattisgarh, in 1972," said Mataji, "in those days my name was Rekha. My family were wealthy merchants" (12).

Her family basically was from Rajasthan and she was the only girl in three generations and therefore she was the most pampered child in the entire family. Everyone of the family remained eager to please her and took care not to displease her in any matter. Once as a child she happened to see Dayasagar Maharaj, a Jain monk, and this made her take interest in the matters of 'Dharma'; i.e. Religion. "I was very impressed and started thinking. It didn't take long before I decided I wanted to be like him. His words and his teachings totally changed my life" (13). Initially, she started observing the rules of ascetic beings such as not to take food after dark, etc. then she went to spend two years with the 'Sanga'. The years spent in the 'Sanga' took her closer to the life of ascetic and at the end of these two years she had come to a firm decision that she would grace the life of ascetic and take 'Diksha' (the Jain ritual of becoming a full time Monk or Nun).

Her decision to take Diksha generated great pains among her family members. No one wanted her to go away from the family and grace the tough life of Nun. But her stern determination brushed away all the hindrances and got them agreed. A day was decided for the Diksha ceremony which was followed by the hair plucking ceremony. She was given a new name 'Prassanmati' as this was something like a rebirth,

Prassanmati Mataji also talks of her bosom friend Prayogmati who took Diksha on the same day under the same Guru as of hers. She says both of them enjoyed good communion. They travelled everywhere together on foot. As it is said

earlier the Jain monks are forbidden to use any vehicle as a means of transportation. Walking is the part of their 'tapasya'. Mataji explains to William, "Walking is very important to us Jains. The Buddha was enlightened while sitting under a tree, but our great Tirthankar, Mahavira was enlightened while walking. We believe that walking is an important part of 'tapasya'. We don't use cars or any vehicles partly because travelling so fast can kill so many living creatures, but partly also because we have two legs and travelling on foot is the right speed for human beings. Walking sorts out your problems and anxieties, and calms your worries" (22).

It was on such travelling on foot journey that her friend Prayogmati started facing troubles, and her troubles grew worse to worst during the span of ten years. Mataji narrates in detail how her friend's health deteriorated day by day and how she nursed her for unto her last breath. At the severe stage of her illness, Prayogmati decided to take 'sulekhana' with idea of being "the victor of death than to be the victim of it" (24). Prassannamati Mataji confesses to William that for the first time in her nun hood she breached the code of conduct and became the butt of frown of her Guruji at the death of her friend Prayogmati. She cried severely though it was against the rule as the Nuns and Monks must be free from ANY sort of affectionate bonds. And she left the place very next morning, "It was the first time as a nun that I had ever walked anywhere alone" (26).

On the last meeting, Prassannamati Mataji reveals to William that now that her friend has departed, it would be easy for her to go too. Thus, she indicates that she has also started walking on the path of 'Sulekhana'. When William questions her if it would not be the waste of precious life and argues that it was right for Prayogmati as she was ill, but for her to take up 'Sulekhana' just at the early age of thirty eight is not a good idea, Mataji presents her views: "'Sulekhana' is the aim of all Jain munies. It is the last renouncement. First you give up your home, then your possessions. Finally you give up your body" (27).

Throughout the account, William lets the Nun narrate her reflections and he remains silent but for some reactional remarks.

The Dancer of Kannur

In the second account, William narrates the details of the *Theyyam* Dancers of Kerala through the case of Hari Das. He follows Hari Das for constant two seasons i.e. two years and from his several personal interactions as well as personal witnessing the dance performances constructs the life story of Hari Das and from his case the plight of his entire class and clan and the glimpses of their struggles, social conflicts and the projection of their coming generations' dilemma as whether to continue with such part-time but lucrative and prestigious occupation or to start a new with some modern vocations.

William digs deep into the entire *Theyyam* tradition and asserts that the very term "*Theyyam*" is the derivation from the Sanskrit word 'Daivam' - i.e. pertaining to the deities. What interests William about this tradition is its inverted cone of the rigid caste system. Kerala- 'God's own country' as the Malayalies prefer to introduce their land, is the most rigid in the caste discriminations. Here the Brahmin and other upper castes, especially the Nairs, enjoyed upper hand in treating the lower caste persons at their own will. The things are same from time ancient, as William quotes Francis Buchanan, the British traveler and doctor, reporting the scenario of caste system in Kerala where the Warrior caste Nair enjoyed the privilege "to behead and kill a lower-caste man if the latter dared to appear on the same road at the same time" (35), even, William further notes, "as late as the early years of twentieth century, lower-caste tenants were still regularly being murdered by their Nair landlords for failing to present sweets as token of their submission" (35).

In the modern times the things are not as rigid as they used to remain in past still; the inter-caste love-affairs involving the lower caste man to the upper caste girl would cause a severe tremor of social unrest. In the ordinary case, in the presence of the upper caste persons "Dalits are still expected to bow their heads and stand at a respectful distance" (35).

The '*Theyyam*' dance is the ritual that inverts the regular caste system as in the *Theyyam* performances Gods and other spiritually powerful deities are claimed to incarnate not in the upper caste Brahmins but in the Dalit youths who rest on the bottom of the social ladder. During the *Theyyam* seasons, from December to February, the *Theyyam* performers, the Dalit youths like Hari Das, are worshipped as the Deities and are considered the powerful sources to secure divine appeasement through their media not only by the lower classes of society but also by the Brahmins

themselves, and are held not in the temples of Brahminical authorities but in the small shrines in the jungle clearances once again symbolically defying the social infrastructural set ups and treating everyone equally. Hari Das presents the picture of the heightened status of the *Theyyam* dancers during the seasons of *Theyyam*:

For those months we become Gods. Everything changes. We don't eat meat or fish and are forbidden to sleep with our wives. We bring blessings to the village and the villagers, and exorcise evil spirits. We are the vehicles through which people can thank the gods for fulfilling their prayers and granting their wishes. **Though we are all Dalits even the most bigoted and casteist Namboodiri Brahmins worship us, and queue up to touch our feet.** (33)

[Emphasis Mine]

The 'Theyyam' tradition has helped the entire community of Dalits to have self-respect and boosted them with confidence and consequently making them take education. In this way, the tradition has helped the entire community in double fold. In the first case it has inspired the Dalit youth to take education and develop, and in the second case the *theyyam* stories have become the media to criticize the unjust treatment of the Dalits at the hands of the so called upper classes and to put forward their right to be treated equally. William has picked up the stories of '*Pottam Theyyam*'; 'Lord Shiva's taking disguise of a poor landless Pullaya [Dalit] in order to teach a lesson of treating each human being equally to the Brahmin of the highest order, Adi Shankaracharya and the story of the Dalit Boy Tityya, to illustrate the case.

Through providing the personal life details of Hari Das, as how and in what sort of lower middleclass environments and through the personal tragedy of losing his mother at the very early stage of life, has come to earn a recognition as a *Theyyam* dancer, William tries to represent the picture of the utopia and dreams, personal and social climate through which the entire Dalit class hails life in the region. It also helps to build the social structure of the area through the case. In the conversations with William Hari Das also points out the modern scenario of class discrimination. Hari Das narrating his recent experience, relates to William, that the Brahmin who touched his feet in the past *theyyam* season, would find it difficult to allow Hari Das in his house. He and his team of well digging would be served food in the leaf dishes in the verandah. Thus, these sorts of incidents indicate the fact that the problem still persists. And through the petitions presented to the *theyyam* deities, it gives a clear picture of the problems of the village folks that they struggle with and thus serves as the indicator of their life standard. William enlists them as the villagers asked for

grandchildren, for jobs, for husbands, for good harvest, for peace and calm in life, for the health of kids and for good education.

Hari Das, in the conversation with William, also pin points the renewed interest of the people as well as the political parties in the Theyyam dances. The rival political groups like RSS and CPM, despite the theyyam fall away from their ethical principles, (RSS is the party basically of the upper class, and the CPMs are atheists), have started patronizing certain Theyyam performances. And this seems a promising sign to Hari Das as for the brighter future of the tradition. On his second visit to Kerala, William finds one of the Theyyam performances being sponsored by Prashant, a recent Gulf return, and the case of Shijju, Prashant's childhood friend, and these details fairly connect to the fact why the political parties have found love for the tradition. With the developing world and environment of competition and complexities of life the emerging middle class, which forms fairly a large part of society, has turned to religious faith for the appeasement of their social, professional or health problems, and the political groups would pick up the chance to win confidence of them by supporting their faith.

Hari Das also presents his worries about the future of the tradition. He tells William that right at present it is a good rewarding occupation, though it is highly demanding and strict codes of conducts, and hopes his sons too take up the same Theyyam occupation but his chief concern lies in the facts that when they get educated and take up other professional occupations which might not allow them to spare the time of three long months as it happens in the case of many of the children of his fellow theyyam dancers.

Along with the traces of theyyan tradition, William also presents the traces of the land of Kerala and her biblical connections, the arrival of the first fleet of the Europeans to the shores of the same lands and refers to the tombs of many of the Britishers who arrived here earlier and pioneered the coming centuries long reign of the entire sub continent.

Daughters of Yellamma

In this account, William discusses the case of the ancient Indian tradition of Devadasi, the tradition that has remained in continuity from the time ancient till day in the South Indian region. The tradition of devoting the girl child to the goddess

Yellamma has its roots in the ancient scriptures. As William presents his investigation, till date though government has banned the tradition (1982 Karnataka Devadasi (prohibition of Dedication) Act) and a number of Non Government Organizations at work voluntarily trying to bring a social awakening among the social groups, a large number of girls are devoted to the goddess Yellamma who in the course of time end up as the mere sex workers and lead a miserable life.

Like his previous accounts, William here too presents the case of Rani --- a Devadasi, and through her painful story tries to cast rays on the entire class of Devadasis. In society this is the class who are looked at with a sort of lust and though the Devadasies like Rani and Kaveri console themselves to be the auspicious symbols and for a unique status in society, people think of them and use them just the tools of quenching their sexual thirst and nothing more. In her conversation with William, Rani aptly quotes the lines of one of the songs being sung among the Devadasis, which is nothing but the illustration of expression of the pain of the Devadasies. "Everyone sleeps with us, but no one marries us. Many embrace us, but no one protects" (57).

The grave problem the class of Devadasis facing is the problem of diseases, especially the AIDS, the incurable one. They are all from the lower strata of society and are all illiterates. And through the unsafe sexual contacts it is likely that they get infected of these diseases. Kaveri, a just 45 year old lady but as William says who looked much older, expressing her agony says: "When we are not beautiful, when our bodies become ugly, then we will be qll alone." But much pain peeps in the next statement: "**If we live long enough to be old and to be ugly. So many are dying**" (57). [Emphasis mine] Kaveri also presents the case of her truck driver brother who has been infected by AIDS, and waiting his death. Her pain, agonies and anxieties find apt reflection in her inventing the image that if she were to narrate her story under a tree, and tell the sadness they had to suffer; the leaves of that tree would fall like tears" (57).

William takes Rani and Kaveri to the temple of Yellamma at Saundatti from Belgaum in Northern Karnataka. Goddess Yellamma is the divine entity whom the Devadasis consider their sole protector and towards her their faith flows unfliningly. In the conversation with William both Rani and Kaveri express their devotion and trust in the Goddess. Even in their pains and sufferings, they console themselves that is is the Goddess who protects them. "The goddess dries our tears", said Rani, "if you come to her with pure heart, she will take away your sadness and your sorrows. What more can she do?" (57)

William presents the mythical context of Yellamma in the Indian scriptures and narrates the entire version of the story of Yellamma. As per it Yellamma was the wife of the famous rishi Jamadagni, an incarnation of Lord Shiva himself. Once the lady failed to perform her task and duty which incurred her a curse from her husband and was turned into a sickly and ugly figure and was thrown out of the household to beg on the roads. When she returned home tired of her sufferings and seeking pardon from her husband, the Rishi still enraged ordered his sons to behead her. To his command, Parshuram, the youngest one, beheaded her. The Rishi, pleased at Parshuram's obedience, asked him to seek a boon, for which Parshuram sought the revival of his mother. Thus, the rishi revived Yellamma but left her forever to continue his feats of asceticism in a cave high in the Himalayas. William commenting on this context draws a parallel between the lives of both the goddess as well as her devotees Devadasis:

Though the story is full of sadness and injustice, Devadasis—as those who have been dedicated, or ‘married’, to a god or goddess are known- like Rani Bai, tell the tale as they believe that it shows how their goddess is uniquely sympathetic to their fate. After all, their lives are little better than hers: cursed for crimes of love outside the bonds of marriage, rejected by their children, condemned like Yellamma to live on roads, begging for favours, disfigured by sadness and without the protection of a husband. (60)

The real life of Rani Bai too presents the same sort of terrible plight. She was, as she narrates to William, dedicated without her knowledge at the adolescent age of six. And when, at the age of fourteen, she got her first period, she was sold to a shepherd. She resisted a lot. She tells she scolded both her mother and her aunt to spoil her life. Later she realized all was done with a hope to secure the divine favours and to secure a monetary source for the family income. Her father was a total failure and a drunkard who gambled and was desperate to have money. It was her father who sold her for the amount of five hundred rupees. As she was adamant not to adopt the ‘business’ (‘dhandha’), as a calculated step, her aunt took her to Bombay where she was planted into a brothel house. The lady at that brothel house showed her professional guts and did not force her to go for sex work against her will. But the gharwali, as Rani narrates, allowed her some time and ultimately Rani ended up as a sex worker. She had first two children over there in Bombay as much of the sexual work was done without condoms or any other contraceptives. Rani then shifted to her village and continued her life of a Devadasi, as she says for eighteen years. In the course of time, she had a lover in the village with whom she enjoyed an affectionate

bonding. She had a daughter out of this relation. But this bond also got an ending on the issue of more children. The man wanted Rani to bear more children out of their relation whereas Rani did not.

Rani appears to be much outspoken and during her conversations with William reiterates her planning to retire to her farms and buying some buffalos and leading her rest of life respectably on the milk business leaving all these dirty work. When William sees no daughters in her household as she referred in her talks, he inquires about them. To this, Rani pauses from her talks and in a weak voice tells William that she has lost both of her daughters.

The story of both of Rani's daughters is also heart rendering. Rani tells William that both of them died of some disease at some interval. Narrating their story she tells William that they both lived the lives of Devdasis. When William questions her why she herself sent them to this profession as a mother, though she herself cursed her own mother to have sent her to this hellish life, Rani relates the painful events of her daughters' lives. She said the first was a singer and at early age of fourteen she eloped, and a year later when she came back no one would marry her.

The second one had some white patches of thighs. They consulted many doctors but they found no cure. Thus, there was no possibility to find any man willing to Marry her too. Thus, there was no alternative left for both of them but to be the Devadasis. Having entered this profession, they met with their premature end, one died at the age of seventeen and the other at fifteen. Rani said to William that one died of some stomach pain and the other died of fever, but later William learnt that both died of AIDS at the very early stage recently within last one year.

William talks about the ancient literary texts which hail the Devadasis in the high spirits. Such texts exist as a fully developed tradition in the southern Indian languages especially in Telugu. William notes that such texts (carved on Copper plates) are deposited in the temple of Tirupathi, and were translated into English by the poet A. K. Ramanujam. William notes the whole apparatus of poetry displays love making of a temple dancing girl (Devadasi) for her client or the love longings of the temple girl for the handsome Lord Krishna. William notes,

These poems of union and separation have sometimes been read as metaphors for the longings of the soul for divine, and of the devotee for god. Yet they are also clearly an expression of unembarrassed joy at sexuality, part of a complex cultural tradition in pre-colonial India where the devotional, metaphysical and the sexual are not regarded as being in any way opposed; on the contrary, they

were seen to be closely linked. Because of their fertility, the temple girls were auspicious. (70)

What William brings out as his research on the Devadasis is that though in Karnataka the Devadasis enjoy the status of auspiciousness and are considered as the symbol of fertility, the main difference in the ancient Devadasi tradition and today's Devadasis, is that in the ancient the Devadasis came from the grandest families, and were the only learned women in society who sometimes counseled the lords, but in modern times only they come from the lowest Dalit-Madar caste and are almost entirely illiterate. While in the medieval temples the Devadasis enjoyed prominent positions, today they have just ended up as the sex workers only. William collects the details about the continuity of this tradition and finds the fact that still there are certain castes and families there is a tradition that one girl in every generation should be dedicated to the goddess and as a result in spite of the government's official ban, every year several thousand Devadasis are added in the existing numbers.

William also visits the place of Rani, at Mudhol, a settlement of many of the Devadasis. William describes the area as the shabbiest one:

It was a dark lane, lit by a single, dim street light. Dogs sat next to open gutters, while half naked children played in the side alleys. It was perhaps the depressing nature of her surroundings that led Rani – always the optimist, always the survivor – to talk up the positive side of her career. (73)

Later when William asked one of the project managers of the NGO which worked for the welfare of the Devadasis, he found alarming details about the HIV infected cases. There prevailed least consciousness about the dangerous results of the disease and the infected were also treated cruelly by the family members. Referring to the case of a girl, the manager said that the infected girl was literally left dying in the corner of the house uncared without food or water. When they got the information they rescued the girl in a semi-comatose state. Here, from this lady William gets the information that Rani, who talked of retiring to a farm and lead a peaceful life by doing the business of buffalo milk, was also infected from last eighteen months. William now realized all the optimistic talks of Rani were just a form of utopia which she was never to realize in her life span.

As the scheme William has adopted for the book, here in this essay too, William serves the purpose of driving the conversations and extracting information from the characters under study, but the much of the narration voices the account of the character from their own mouth.

The Singer of Epics

The Singer of Epics narrates the tradition of the oral recitation of the folk epics --- the tradition that is still in existence with all its live colours in Rajasthan—the northern state of India. Here in this essay too, William picks up the life story of one such Epic Singer, follows him, witnesses him perform, visits his village, collects his personal family details and presents his story along with excavating the history and other details of the tradition at large. Thus, through the individual case tries to present the condition of the entire class, culture and ethical and ethnographical practices. He, here, also tries to figure out the elements that have kept the oral tradition alive in Rajasthan while in the Western world the grand epics like *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and the *Songs of Roland* have just remained the legacy only of academics and literature classes.

He presents the account how he got interested in the tradition as when he went to the Rohet Garh Palace near Jodhpur, located in the patch of Dessert seclusion, the palace in which his travel writer Role Model Bruce Chatwin penned his famous *The Songlines*. To write his own book *City of Djinnns*, William too stayed in this palace and during his stay one of the elderly ladies talked of the oral tradition in the region. William, having felt curious about the tradition, looks for the ‘Bhopas’—the village shamans and bards who kept the tradition alive for centuries and tries to drive his research in the direction, as to how and why the oral tradition has still survived in the regions of Rajasthan whereas the same traditions are on the verge of extinction in the other parts of the world.

On the primary inquiries and collection of the details regarding the oral performances, William comes to know the fact that these epics narrated basically the stories of the local Heroes who either died heroic death or showed unprecedented chivalrous adventures in the course of lives, and more particularly they hailed from the regal or nomadic lineages who died while rescuing a community’s cattle from rustlers. “Every prominent family of the land holding Rajput caste inherited a family of oral genealogists, musicians and praise singers, who celebrated the family’s lineage and deeds” (87).

The possible evolution of these long poetic epics might have been the generation to generation business and the main point of their survival is the spiritual powers attributed to the recitations as well as the protagonists of the poems. Considering the point, William notes,

A long accumulation of hagiography had transformed the historical characters into gods: the story of Bhomaya, or martyr-hero, was kept alive, memorial stones were erected and in due course miracle stories began to spread, telling of how the hero had manifested himself to save his people after his death. Memorial stones became shrines, and over the centuries the legends grew into epics, and the heroes into gods, so that the different warriors at the centre of each epic became the particular deity of a different caste community. (87-88)

The aunt at the Rohet Gharh palace informs William about the interest and research of one of their distant neighbors and friend Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat and arranges the meeting with her in Jaipur. Rani Laxmi Kumari Chundawat narrates to William her efforts to save the oral epic of Dev Narayan by getting it scripted at her own place while the Bhopa sang it and she herself taking the dictation of it as she sensed the point that against the threats and increasing popularity of television and films among the new generations the oral epic was on the verge of extinction.

Here at her place, William happens to meet Mohan Bhopa, with whom he was to make performances at many conferences and literary festivals.

William describes the life of Mohan Bhopa and his wife Batasi very closely. Describing their persona William goes:

Mohan Bhopa was a tall wiry dark-skinned man of about sixty, with a bristling grey handlebar moustache and a mischievous, skull-like grin. He wore a long red robe and a tightly tied red turban. Batasi was somewhat younger than him, a silent, rugged dessert woman of fifty who had lived all her life in wilderness. As we drove, she kept almost all her face shrouded in a high-peaked red veil. (78-79)

Mohan was a bard and shaman of the village, a complete illiterate and represented the last line of the hereditary singers of a great Rajasthani medieval poem, *'The Epic of Pabuji'*. The poem is six century old and narrates the adventures of a semi-divine warrior and incarnate god, Pabuji. Pabuji fought bravely against the rustlers who intended to drive away and kidnap the goddess's cow herds. Pabu killed the chief of the kidnappers, Jindrav Khinchi. He also saved the honour of his women from another villain, a barbaric, cow-murdering Muslim plunderer named Mirza Khan Patan. Pabuji is also claimed to have defeated the Ramayana fame demon King Ravana and brought the herds of camels to the region from the land of Ravana, just in order to gift them to one of his nieces as marriage offering.

Willing to witness the oral epic being performed in its real and natural environment, William visits Mohan's village Pabusar, named after the great martyr hero, Pabu. William notes that the epic comprised of 4000 lines and:

it takes a full five nights of eight hour, dusk-till-dawn performances to unfold. ... it can on occasion take much longer. But the performance is not looked upon as just a form of entertainment. It is also a religious ritual invoking Pabuji as a living deity and asking for his protection against ill-fortune. (79)

Apart from the requirement of a couple (desirably, husband-wife) in enacting the story in the accompaniment of music, another important property in the performance is the *PHAD*. Mohan informed William the importance of the Phad in the epic performance.

Mohan explained to me that once the phad was complete and the eyes of the hero were painted in, neither the artist nor the bhopa regarded it as a piece of art. Instead, it instantly became a mobile temple: as Pabuji's devotees were semi nomadic herders, his temple – the phad – visited the worshipers rather than the other way around. It was believed that the spirit of the god was now in residence, and that henceforth the phad was a ford linking one world with the next, crossing place from the human to the divine. (84)

Mohan Bhopa further informs William that the spirit of the deity resided in the Phad and remained asleep till the Bhopa (epic singer) invokes Him through the typical dance. He also tells William about their faith that the deity's visiting the site of invocation and giving the signs of His presence:

Sometimes when we recite the epic, towards dawn the lamp glows white. It happens when we reach the crux of the story – when Pabuji gives water to the stolen cattle that he has saved. At that point we know that Pabuji is pleased, that things are starting to happen, and I am empowered. It's usually around 4 a. m. then I get the glimpse of future . . . but it's very rare, and happens only when we complete performance. (99)

William notes here the link that this is the element and belief in the magic power of healing of the teller of tales has kept the tradition intact even in the twenty first century in Rajasthan. The performance remains full of people seeking graces of Pabuji for the cure of ailing castles or family members. However, there are people who now have begun to take advice of vet. Still, Mohan expressed his clear views that there is no doctor or vet who could match the healing powers of Pabuji.

William also presents the research work of other scholars on the oral traditions. Milman Parry's research on the oral traditions in Yugoslavia also refers the

identical causes of survival and dying out of the oral traditions in European continent. He also mentions the case of the popular Muslim epic the Dastan-i-Amir Hamza. As compared to the Mahabharata, the western epics and once famous epic of Dastan-i-Amir Hamza have not succeeded in keeping their appeal alive to the newer generations. The interesting fact that both Millman Parry's and Komal Kothari's research have brought out is the level of literacy of the bards practicing the oral traditions as Millman has pointed out, "illiteracy was one of the essential conditions for oral tradition;" Komal Kothari too found in his research that the Bhopa whom he sent to the Adult education programme with a view to helping him out in his art had to refer to his diary whereas his illiterate counterparts could recite thousands of verse orally without any script. Thus, the conclusion which can be derived on the study is: "It's not lack of interest, but literacy itself, that was killing the oral epic." [Pp. 95] William points out another factor that has affected the popularity of the oral performances is the telecast of the Sanskrit epics Ramayana and Mahabharata on the national television. This gave a standardizing effect which affected adversely to the local variations of the epics like Pabuji.

Amid all the unfavorable forces, the family of Mohan is trying hard to keep the tradition flowing from older generation to the next generation. Mohan's sons both Mahavir and Sravan are trained for the performances. The problem for Mahavir, the elder son of Mohan, is that his wife is not a good singer and this does not fulfill the condition of being a full-fledged Bhopaji, as the phad must be sung with the Male-female partnership. The younger son Sravan is not married yet, and Mohan is hopeful that since he (Sravan) has great trust on Pabuji, he would get a wife with sweet voice and in the course of time he would succeed in teaching her their family heritage of Pabuji ki Phad. Even, Mohan's grandson i.e. Mahavir's son Onkar too appears to be possessing the guts for the at this early stage.

William, like his previous essays, here too touches the caste issue and tries to locate Mohan Bhupaji's position on the social caste system. He presents Mohan Bhupaji's words on the issue:

We Nayaks are from a very low caste. At some point in our history we became nomads, and so fell from the high position we once had: people never trust nomads. Still to this day we cannot eat or drink in the house of many of the people in this village. But when we recite or perform as bhopas, this brings us respect. I may not sit at the same level as Rajputs or the Brahmins, but they come to see me here, they commission me to read the phad for them and they

are happy and proud about my success and my fame in the villages nearby.
(103)

In the postscript, William narrates how just on some bureaucratic grounds such a grand performer and preserver of ancient tradition was left without any medical treatment and died of leukemia within the ten days of first diagnosis.

The Red Fairy

In *The Red Fairy* William presents the case of a lady Qalander about whom William happens to hear at Bhit Shah, in Sindh region of Pakistan and meets her at the shrine of Shahbaz Qalander. The essay along with presenting the life story of Red Fairy, i.e. Lal Peri also throws light on the Sufism a curious blend of Hinduism and Islam and the wake of Talibanism which has marked some threats to the cult in the region. William digs deep into the history as to how the curious blend of Hinduism and Islam would have originated. To the painful and life stuffed with enormous struggle of Lal Peri, William comments:

The more I heard the details of her story, the more her life seemed to encapsulate the complex relationship of Hinduism with the different forms of South Asian Islam, swerving between hatred and terrible violence, on one hand, and love and extraordinary syncretism on the other. (121)

At the very outset trying to locate the possibilities of such syncretism, William considers the geography of the Sindh region as a mighty factor which served as a safe and secure abode of those who fled from the terrible clutches of orthodoxy. The basis of the Sufism is laid on the faith and trust on Humanity and not on the cobweb of rituals.

All the religions were one, maintained the Sufi saints, merely different manifestations of the same divine reality. What was important was not the empty ritual of the mosque or temple, but to understand that divinity can best be reached through the gateway of the human heart – that we all have Paradise within us, if we know where to look. (113)

William notes that the Sufism has worked in both the directions. On one hand, it has attracted many Hindus towards the Islamic faith, whereas on the other it has also created a sort of awareness about Hinduism especially the mystic ways of Hinduism among the Indian Muslims. He cites the case of Latif and his songs who sings the glory of Hinduism in his famous text collection, Risalo ‘Sur Ramkali’.

William brings to the light that the Sehwan Sherif where stands the dargah of the sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalander (The Red Royal Falcon) was once the major centre of the great Hindu God Lord Shiva, “indeed the town’s original name was Sivistan, the city of Shiva” (116); William notes that though the place has lost all its traits of being a Hindu shrine, still the one of the Shajjad Nasheen or the hereditary tomb guardians is Hindu and the opening ceremony of the annual ‘Urs is still performed by the Hindu. He also notes that the Shiva Lingam has recently been removed to a locked annexe in 1970s.

The Sufism flourished out of the syncretism of the Hindu and the Islam faiths, still in the Sindh it retained the outer coloring of Islam with very little traits of Hinduism within it, still it is the cult that has been hated and attacked by the most rigid Islamic groups. William sorts out the reason for the growing hatred towards this cult: “The wild and ecstatic night-long celebrations marking the anniversary of the saint’s death were almost compendium of everything of which Islamic puritans most disapprove...” (115) The followers and worshippers take resorts to love poetry, dancing with women, smoking Hashish and worship the dead saints rather than adoring the God Almighty directly; the Islamic extremists consider this kind of activities as anti Islamic. In his conversation with the Wahhabi Saleemullah, the person who operated the Wahhabi Saudi Arab aided Madresse in Sehwan put it clearly: “Sufism is not Islamic. It is jadoo: magic tricks only. It has nothing to do with Islam. It is just superstition, ignorance, perversion, illiteracy and stupidity” (138).

The most attractive and unique ritual in the Sufism is the daily Dhammal: the devotional dance to the saint, which is performed every day evening at sunset, after the Magrib prayer. The person who directed William to Sehwan Sherif at Bhit Shah, had told him not to miss two things at the shrine of Sehwan Sherif; the first the daily Dhammal and Lal Peri, the Red Fairy.

William reaches the shrine of Sehwan Sherif at the time of Dhammal. He observes the dance of the men and women who danced tuned with the pounding music. “The dancing gradually turned from a meditative and prayerful swaying to something much more wild and frenzied and ecstatic” (118). The secrets of this sorts of dance and attribution of its healing powers are actually lie in the facts that through such ecstasy., notes William, people find a safety valve for the tensions that keep creeping up in their minds and which under the loads of social honors and statuses could not be expressed or vented in other ways. Through such exposure to music and dancing people get transported to a state of trance which eventually repairs the tormenting elements within their psyche. William states the fact that not all the

physical ailments are the results of physical problems but the roots of most of them lie in some psychological distresses which get in the process of ecstatic purgation.

William's historian's sprits are at work here too. Digging deep into the possible genesis of the 'Dhammal', he brings out the statements and observations made by the Chinese traveler Huien Tsang in sixth-century:

Sehwan was the cult centre of a Shaivite sect called Pashupats who believed in emulating the dance of Shiva as a part of their rituals, using this shamanistic dancing as a way of reaching union with God. Remarkably, Sehwan Sharif seems to have maintained the ancient Shaivite dance of the Pashupats in a thinly Islamicised Sufi form. (118)

William also mentions the opinions of other scholars that the Sufi Fakirs' dreadlocks, red robes and dust-smearing on bodies is nothing but modeling on those of Shaivite Sadhus.

At the Dhammal dance at Sehwan Sherif, as he had been informed about the Red Fairy at Bhit Shah, he notices Lal Peri, i.e. Red Fairy dancing impressively at one corner holding her signature club in one hand. William approaches her and collects information from her not only about the Sufi Cult but also about her personal life as how she has happened to arrive here and managed to make her room in the considerably male-dominated cult.

The life-story of Lal Peri is a heart rendering one. From her comparative dark complexion William guessed her to be a Siddi I., e. the one of African origin, but she denied it and to William's shock revealed that she came from Bihar. William got here wonderstruck thow a lady from Bihar in India would have come to thr Sindh region of Pakistan. Lal Peri relates her story in detail how she lost her father in TB and her uncle confiscated all their land. Her mother, however, remarried to a person who displayed great dislike for her. Still, she says, she was happy in her village. But all of a sudden there grew communal agitations in her Village Sonapur, a village on the Border of Bangladesh. Before those developments the village was a perfect place of harmony even they were not even conscious about the religious differences. She says her best friend was a Hindu girl, and her father's best friend was also Hindu. As the village had Muslim majority, they felt safe. But one day the entire village was attacked by the outsiders and they killed many of the males which included her step father and her uncle too. Somehow, her maternal uncle was not present in the mosque that day and was saved. With the help of him, she with her mother and brother managed to cross the border and reached Bangladesh. The things started to get settled over there when there was a spread of hatred for the Bihari people. They were hunted

and killed. When they heard of Pakistan government's scheme of offering land, work and Shelter to the Bihari, she left for Pakistan with her brother. She says, her mother preferred to stay back with her cousins in Bangladesh. Reaching Pakistan, they were planted at the Sindh where they were made to work for ginning factories at poor wages. Initially the things were very tough but, says she, they managed to survive and things went to a normal rut. At such juncture she lost her brother in a factory accident. Her sister in law, her brother's wife ill-treated her so she left the house and since then she has been taking shelter here in the house of Qalander, her only and sole protector.

Thus, as William puts it,

She was in fact a triple refugee: first as a Muslim driven out of India into East Pakistan after Hindu-Muslim riots in the late 1960s; then as a Bihari driven out of East Pakistan at the creation of Bangladesh in 1971; and finally as a single woman taking refuge in the shrines of Sindh while struggling to live the life of a Sufi in the male-dominated and increasingly Talibanised society of Pakistan. (121)

Along with her painful life story, William also inspects the factors that contributed to the flourishing of the Sufism in the sub-continent. William mentions Dara Sukhoi, the prince of Shah Jehan, the great Mughal emperor of India, was taught by a sufi scholar and so Dara's attempts to bring a sort of communion between the two faiths are the results of such training. Dara under the strong influence of his tutor, Mian Meer, wrote a treatise on Sufiesm 'The Compass of truth', he also translated the Hindu religious texts into Persian. He also wrote "a comparative study of Hinduism and Islam, The Mingling of Two Oceans, which emphasized the compatibility of the two faiths and common source of their divine revelations" (116). However, William points out that the attempts of Dara though casted and created radical influences on the elite Muslim classes of India at his time, still, it could not satiate the ulemas at operations who sternly held all the traits of Sufism against the Quarnic scriptures. And therefore, William comments in the context of the clashes between the extremist orthodoxy of Islam and Sufism: "What is happening today is only the latest round of a much more ancient and intractable theological conflict within the Islamic world" (136).

The Monk's Tale

In *The Monk's Tale*, William narrates the case of a Buddhist Monk, Passang who dropped his Monk's vow just in order to fight against the Chinese invasion in Tibet as it appeared a direct threat to the very existence of his 'Dharma'. Passang defends his stand of dropping the vow and take the weapons in hand in the following terms: 'I knew that if I stayed in a monastery under the Chinese there was no point in being a monk. They wouldn't let me practice my religion. So, to protect the ways of the Lord Buddha, the Buddhist dharma, I decided to fight. (146)

William meets him at Dharamshala, the Dalai Lama's residence-in-exile, a city on the Himalayan Range. The point that attracts William's interest in him is his giving up the monastic vows and taking up arms to resist. Basically, the Buddhism is the religion whose basis is founded on the principles of non-violence and love to any living creature. And in that, it is natural that it would surprise any observer when a Monk, the preacher of the principles, resorts to violence and takes the weapons in hands.

When William meets the Monk, Passang, he has got retired from the Army, a special Tibetan unit of the Indian Army, and lives in the old people's house at Dharamshala. In the conversations with William Passang shares his feelings after incurring the violence and his attempts to atone his bad deeds through daily rituals of regrets. He tells William that he has met many Lamas and visited many holy places. Citing the example of the great robber Angulimal, he tries to derive a kind of self satisfaction that he would also be forgiven since he has also been remorseful true heartedly for what he has done. Still, his agonies are not calmed down through all these means. He confesses:

The lamas told me that if my motivation was pure, and I had done violent acts to help others at the expense of my own karma, then I can still be saved. But every sentient being has life and even the thought of killing makes me unhappy. In truth I don't know how much forgiveness I have gathered. I don't know yet whether on my deathbed I will feel calm and satisfied. May be I will never know... (149)

In his talks peeps a clear remorse for the violence he has committed though it was never driven out of any personal lust or greed, but it was for the good of his entire community and dharma.

William visits him at the McLeod Ganj, the Tibetan settlement in Dharamshala which he calls 'a miniature Tibet-outside-Tibet', where in an old people's house Passang has settled after retirement and has taken the vow of monk after thirty years from once he renounced them. Passang devotes his spare time after his three time ritual prayers in making wooden blocks and painting flags.

Life of Tashi Passang is no less than a thriller. Passang narrates the entire chronicle of his life to William bit by bit in several sittings. Passang was born, he says to William, in 1936 in an upper middle class family in Dapka of Kham province of Eastern Tibet. The family led a semi-nomadic life just to cope with the weather of the region. It was a sort of joint family leading life on the cattle rearing and farming suited to the seasons. He started going with his Yak-herds from the early age. One of his uncles was a Monk, and fascinated to his preaching and personality, Passang also dreamt of being a Monk. He embraced the Buddhism as a Monk with the help of his uncle and was happy leading life of a Monk. But his happiness was not going to last long. During that time, even before he became Monk, they noticed the presence of Chinese troops in their provinces. Initially, Passang says, the Chinese troops behaved very frankly, they had easily overpowered and outnumbered the primitive under developed Tibetan Army. The Chinese announced that they were just like the elder brother of Tibet and all they wanted was to help Tibet develop which they thought was not possible for the Tibet to achieve single handedly. Soon, the Tibetans and the Buddhist Monks sensed the malignant ideals of the Chinese troops who had begun to appear in larger number than before.

When Tibetans started gathering and collecting weapons, the Chinese started suppression. Passang became the victim of their oppression. When he was hiding in the mountains with rifle, the Chinese came his home and tying his mother started beating her. This kept on going everyday morning and evening for a month till Passang got the news and he surrendered his rifle. The severe beating had caused several internal injuries to his mother who died soon afterwards. The death of his mother filled Passang with great hatred for the Chinese and though it was against his vows, he wanted to avenge the death of his mother.

Meanwhile, all the monks and other Tibetans started gathering at Lhasa with the determination of agitating the Chinese, but their protest could not resist the power and number of the Chinese army and all had to flee. The things grew so severe that even the Dalai Lama had to flee secretly. Passang and some of his fellows got commissioned to protect His Highness Dalai Lama. At one point of conversation, William asks Passang if all these sufferings, pains and tortures and even loss of own

land make him weaken his faith. To this, Passang says instead it strengthened his faith and narrated the incidents in which he and his companions were saved from death or injuries from the deadly ammunitions fired at them by the Chinese PLA. And at the same time quotes the Buddhist principle of 'Karma':

We Buddhists believe in Karma, and in cause and effect. An action has consequences; we are the consequences of our acts. Perhaps because there was a time in the seventh century when we Tibetans invaded the Chinese, so we are suffering this torture now. It is our turn to suffer for what we did in our previous lives. (168)

Passang also talks about his getting recruited in the Indian Army in the Special Frontier Force or Sector 22 at the wake of Indo-China war of 1962. He says he and many of his brethrens joined the army with a hope to get a chance to fight back to china for the freedom of Tibet. But he feels sorry that he never had such a chance instead he had to kill many Pakistanis in the Indo-Pak war of 1971. He retired from the Army position in 1986, and as he had promised himself, he took the first bus to Dharamshala and here, he has been trying to make up for what he had done as a soldier. The effect of prayers have a considerable softening effects on him, and the fire of hatred that remained burning for the Chinese for what they had done to his mother since her death has started getting extinguished.

Whenever I saw a Chinese restaurant in India, I would want to throw stones at it. Even the colour red could make me boil with anger at what the Chinese have done. But after I heard His Holiness say we must defeat hatred, I determined that I would try to eat a Chinese meal in a Chinese restaurant to try to cure myself of this rage. I wanted to wash my anger clean, as His Holiness puts it, to wash clean the blood. (173-174)

At the time of William's meeting him, Passang was in his 70s, and when William asks him about his planning to go back to his Motherland and see his only surviving brother, Passang confesses that he felt a great urge to go back and die in the lap of his motherland. But somehow, conquering his personal feeling as if it were the sign of his personal weakness, he expresses his desire: "But you know...I have always felt that all of us fled together, and I should wait until a time came when we could all go back together. It wouldn't be right to go back alone..." (175).

The Maker of Idol

In *The Maker of Idol*, William presents the details of the Chola bronze idols of deities – ‘the greatest works of art ever created in India’, and their creator artists. Srikanda is a friend of his friend Krishnmurthy, from whom William collects information about the art and its lineage. William also picks up ground to comment on the Indian, especially South Indian religious patterns, their temples, deities and the forms of festivals woven around the deities throughout the year and in the lives of the people too.

William, unlike his other essays, is more eloquent in this essay and presents his research on the iconography and the genesis of the tradition of the bronze idols in the south India, and also makes long commentary on the eroticism displayed in the South Indian fine arts; especially sculptures and literary traditions. What interests William more in this area is the fact he finds that the sexuality and erotic expressions have been closely connected with the spirituality. The idols of the deities, both Gods and Goddesses, are the epitome of attractiveness with beautiful curves and bearing all traits of physical magnificence. William maintains that the expression of art erotica just through the implied gestures in the idols or in the literary texts as well as spiritual scriptures is the result of the existence of many paths leading to the divinity in the Hinduism. He cites two examples of this; the famous idol of Nataraja and the other is that of ‘Sringarshatakam’ of the poet prince Bhartruhari. The famous Nataraja statue represents on one hand the defeat of the demons of ignorance and darkness and the pleasure of his consort; on the other it also stands for the destruction of the universe just in order to give a way to the brand new one. Whereas in the literary text, ‘Sringarshatakam’, the poet presenting his dilemma raises open question as to which path one should advance to: “There are two paths; the devotion of the sage, which is lovely because it overflows with the nectarous waters of the knowledge of truth, and the lusty undertaking of touching with one’s palm that hidden part in the firm lap of lovely limbed women, with great expanses of breasts and thighs” (190). Even the full grown Chola poetic tradition is replete with the erotic concerns. For this, William puts his observation as:

Sexuality in India has always been regarded as the subject of legitimate and sophisticated inquiry. Traditionally it was looked upon as an essential part of

the study of aesthetics: 'sringar rasa' – the erotic rasa or flavour- being one of the nine rasa comprising the classical Hindu aesthetic system. (187)

And also notes that in the Hindu scheme of the things, *Kama* remains one of the three (actually, there should be four; the fourth being 'Moksha', the ultimate liberation of the soul from the cycle of births and rebirths) fundamental goals of human existence, along with *dharma*, duty or religion, and *arth*, the creation of wealth" (187).

From his conversation with Srikanda, William comes to know that there is a full length guidance book on the art of sculptures in Sanskrit language; '*The Shilp Shastras*'. On William's curiosity about the beauty and magnificence of the idols, he points out clearly:

What is so strange about the statues being beautiful and attractive? The erotic is part of human life – the secret part – and the idol is the human form of God, God in the form of man. If it was unattractive and ugly, would any one pray to it? The Shilp Shasrtas that guide us sculptors lay down certain norms about the correct proportion for each God. We believe that unless these proportions are exactly perfect, the god cannot live in the idol. As sculptors, we struggle to become the master craftsmen just so that we can convey the beauty of the deity. (191)

William also brings under the focus of the significance of the idols in the Hinduism. Actually, he notes, the ancient *Vedic* texts prescribe the devotional rituals through '*Yagna*' traditions i.e. fire ceremonies, somewhere it also prescribes to go for animals sacrifice, and at some extreme levels it also suggest the total renouncement of worldly life and leading the existence as the ascetics. In all these, the worshipping of the temple idols gave the followers a privilege to extend their devotions through the deities via media of the idols and it secured the salvation as forcefully as the other forms of devotions.

Here the final climax of worship is still to have *darshan*: to actually see the beauty of the divine image, and to meet the eyes of the god. The gaze of the bronze deity meets the eye of the worshiper, and it this exchange of vision – the seeing and the seen – that acts as a focus for *bhakti*, the passionate devotion of the devotee. (191)

William visits the south Indian city of temples Swamimalai to witness the festival procession and there he comes to know that it is the place where the Chola tradition of Idol making has survived. He visits the place a couple of times. On his first visit, he wanted to see the religious procession that was held every year in the

village. It was the event in which the villagers were taking the deities for their marriage. He presents the story of the marriage of the divine couple; Murugan, the son of lord Shiva and Valii, a daughter of sage Sivamurti and most beautiful girl, from which the girl belonged to this village. The villagers proudly assert that it was in the fields of this very village in which the divine couple made love. Every year to commemorate the marriage, the procession is taken out, in which the divine idols are mounted on the *rath* (chariot) and are taken out to the marriage site. The event holds great importance as the local people believe that since the deities themselves come to their doorsteps, any prayer or petition made with pure heart would be granted on this special occasion.

William also presents the details of the historical grounds which might have started and inspired the craft of bronze idol making. He notes that the temples of Tamil Nadu are thought of as the palaces of the deities and it is understood that the deities were the kings and they liked to observe their territories and domains instead of sitting in the palaces. So the tradition of taking the deities out in the procession on the days of special festivals came into existence.

When these temples were first built, the large stone idols of the temple sanctuaries were often found to be too large to move around. It was for this reason that in the tenth century the first portable bronze deities began to be cast in Southern India. The art seems to have begun in the court of the Pallava monarchs of Kanchipuram, but it was under the patronage of their nemesis, the Chola kings of Tanjore, that the sculptors of this region brought the art to perfection. (184)

Srikanda informs William that he belongs to the lineage of those famous Chola sculptors. Srikanda Stapathy, a Brahmin, along with his two brothers has been creating the bronze idols through the same process and spiritual rituals as the entire Chola idols have been prepared in the course of time. William visits Srikanda stpathy's workshop and witnesses himself how with great devotions the god deities found their shapes. The entire process, says Srikanda, has to be done as it has been prescribed in the *shastras*. Sikanda presents his own views that he does never look at the idols as the pieces of art but for him they are like real deities, and he considers himself just medium through whom the deities took their human forms. It clearly appears from his talks that he regards his work with great reverence. "Our workshop should be like a temple. Every second is holy. Some people think that what we do is an art, but we think of it mainly as an act of devotion. For us art and religion are one: only when there is prayer can the artist make a perfect sculpture" (197).

Srikanda informs William with a tinge of proud as how he himself inherited the art of bronze casting, the unbroken tradition of 700 years, and the perfection they have achieved in it. He also talks of his training under his father's observations. But, at William's inquiry, whether his son would continue the lineage, he expresses concern that his son was showing much interest in computers and if he did well in the exam, he was much keen to adopt that career than to work as the sculptor.

The Lady Twilight

In *The Lady Twilight* William narrates the case of Manisha Bhairavi Ma and her companion protector Tapan Sadhu, who live in the cremation land of Tara Pith, near Kolkatta, West Bengal. William tracks these rather sinister looking place, gathers the confidence of both Manisha and Tapan, the dwellers of this cremation ground and the ardent devotees of the Goddess Tara, and makes them narrate their life stories along with the rituals and tactics of worship of the 'Tantric' cult. The place is, on the one hand, the cremation ground where the dead people are brought for their last funeral pyre, and on the other the sadhus, here, are notoriously known for their mysterious worshipping and exercising the 'Tantric'(black-magic) rituals. And this is enough to keep the ordinary people to keep away from the place. Only those would come who want to secure the unprecedented graces and blessings of Goddess Tara through the medium of the tantric like Manisha Ma or Tapan Sadhu or many like them who have made the place their home and devoted their entire existence in the worshipping of the Mother Goddess Tara.

William only points out in this essay that Tara Pith is the Shakt Pith, "One of the most holy places in India, and said to be the abode of the Devi's Third Eye." (205) but he drops going in to the details of the concept of the Shakt Pith in the Indian Mythology. Actually, the concept is built upon the mythological story of Lord Shiva's deadly dance of "Tandav" which he performed at the suicidal death of his consort 'Sati' in the Ritual Pyre of Yagna at Daksha Prajapati's, her father's, place on seeing that her husband Lord Shiva was not assigned his honoured Seat and thus insulted. When Lord Shiva came to know about the death of his beloved wife he rushed to the spot and lifted her burning body on his shoulders and started the deadly dance of 'Tandav' in the rage. The dance was so destructive and severe to bear for any living being that it created a threat to the very existence of the universe. Sensing the threat

and in order to calm Lord Shiva down, Lord Narayan released his 'Sudarshan Chakra' which started piercing the body of dead 'Sati' and cut it into pieces and those pieces fell to various fifty-one places; these places eventually came to be regarded the sacred and the most holy places for 'Shakti' upasana i.e. 'shakt pith'. It is this place of Tara Pith that her third eye is said to have fallen.

William notes that the best place where Goddess Tara is worshipped is not the well built temple altars but she the place where she can best be evoked is the grounds of cremation.

Tara is, after all, one of the most wild and wayward of Hindu goddesses, and cannot be tamed and contained within a venerated temple image. She is not only the goddess of supreme knowledge who grants her devotees the ability to know and realize the Absolute, she is also the Lady Twilight, the Cheater of Death, a figure of horror and terror, a stalker of funeral pyres, who slaughters demons and evil 'yakshis' without hesitation, becoming as terrible as them in order to defeat them: in the tenth-century hymn of a hundred names from 'Mundamala Tantra', Tara is called 'She Who likes Blood, She Who Is Smearred with Blood and She Who Enjoys Blood Sacrifice. (211)

William goes into the deep in the direction of the genesis of the whole tantric sect, which he senses is present in similar forms in the East and the West, both cultures. He asserts that the terms 'star' (English), 'Tara' (Sanskrit), 'Stella' (Latin), 'Aster' (Greek), 'Sitara' (Persian) bear conspicuous sameness which occur in the different languages of Indo-European Family of Languages and sees the possibilities of the Catholic cult of Our Lady Stella Mariis, and the tradition of worshipping the goddess as the consort of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and as the source of female energy in Mahayan Buddhism being the parts of the same tradition.

Further, what surprises William is the continuity and survival of the cult as well as its ardent followers and people devoting their entire lives for worship of the Goddess Tara, and daily sacrifice of no less than twenty goats till the day even in the nation whose people and majority of faiths advocate 'Ahimsa' (Non-Violence). During his stay with Manish Ma William notices that the devotees included people from all strata of society. There were range of people either seeking success at the political fronts or desirous to pacify the goddess in order to secure peace in the family as well as success in business. The Sadhus also came from different social sets. While Manish Ma came from the strata of lower middle working class, Tapan was a Brahmin, and his family was the educated one and his family members never approved of nor trusted or showed any reverence and faith for the mysterious 'dirty'

path he had adopted. William also mentions the threat posed to the cult by the existent Communist Government by their campaign against the futility and meaninglessness of the supernatural sorcery. But, in the corrupt and God fearing social set ups, such threats did not hold any serious alarm.

Next thing that interests William is the role of 'Skulls' in this cult, for there were a lot many skulls spread all over the place. The essay itself opens with his questioning about the skulls to Manisha Ma. Manisha Ma, though mentions at some place that everything cannot be revealed, tells William that there is a special ritual of curing the skulls. In the tantric cult there is different significance of different skulls. She tells him that the skulls of suicidal death, of virgin girls given much significance. The night of the 'No Moon Day' is considered the favourite time of the goddess, and the prayers and petitions lodged at that time get easily granted. William asks her if she had 'seen' the goddess. To this she confesses though she has come across certain apparitions and the goddesses favourite animals like jackals etc., the goddess has never appeared to her in her real form. This she considers as the lack in her own devotion for her, but she is sure some day, she will surely get the 'Darshan' of the goddess.

William here notes that the cult is by and large the product of the much obsessive orthodoxy Brahminical Hinduism. The things, the material, the place, the time which are considered inauspicious and avoided with strict rigidity are fairly welcome in this worshiping. Still, on the night of No Moon Day, when there was a great pooja and sacrificial offerings presented to the Goddess, William sees the tantric could not find any alternative to the yagna-fire.

It is on this night that Manisha Ma and Tapan Sadhu talk to William about their personal lives before they ended up here in the cremation land as tantrics. Both Manisha Ma and Tapan Sadhu are a kind of outcaste from their family set ups. Before getting settled here, both had their own families. Manisha Ma was married in a middleclass family and had three daughters from it, and her husband ran a shop. But somehow owing to her troubled childhood or feelings of unfit marriage locks, she got a sort of fit, which the local people took to be 'Possession'. Right from childhood, she says, she enjoyed the bhajans and devotional songs. Even after marriage she kept spending much time at the local temple, for which her mother-in-law objected. And, at the temple, her fit, that frequented more, was started to be considered as 'Possession' of divine spirit and people started worshiping her and tried to interpret whatever she spoke during her fit. This increased interest of the local people in her and they started visiting her at her home too. With the fear that this kind of

display of fit and people crowding around his wife would adversely affect his business, her husband picked up a quarrel with her and beat her severely. On that day, Manisha left her house forever. Initially she spent some weeks at temples and other places and at last came and settled at a place near Tapan Sadhu's hut in the cremation ground. She confesses that she was interested in Tapan Sadhu, but initially could not collect courage to talk to him. Tapan Sadhu was a Brahmin. He was married and had two children. But after twenty years of married life, he says, he got the call of Goddess Tara and left everything and came to reside here in Tara Pith. As Manisha was residing near his hut, people in the cremation ground started gossiping about their relationship, so one day Manisha went up to him and asked him to let her live with him and to end all the business of the gossip about their relationship. To this, Tapan agreed and promised her to protect her and since then they are living together. Tapan, who appears strong and sturdy, is a person in his sixties. He also confesses that he was greatly pained when he was not allowed to meet and talk to his son on the event of his wife's death. He says his family consists of the people who would never trust or show any faith for whatever he is doing. Manisha also has lost her husband, and now is pleased that she could lately maintain contacts with her daughters who came searching her to the cremation ground of Tara Pith after her husband's death. In all this, Manisha clearly mentions to William that though the people like them who are living in such sinister looking place are considered as outlaws and with a sort of contempt, they all live here in the spirit of social unity. They all care for each other and stand strongly in the time of need when one needs support and soothing.

For such place of Tara Pith, William sums up that it is the result of social process of reaction.

Tara Pith, in other words, is a place where the ordinary world is comprehensively turned upside down. Today, the rites that take place in the burning ground involve forbidden substances and practices - alcohol, ganja and ritualised sex, sometimes with menstruating women - for Tara's devotees believe that the goddess transmutes all that is forbidden and taboo, and turns these banned acts and forbidden objects into pathways of power. On to this base of transgressive sacrality has grown a whole body of esoteric practice involving secret knowledge, rituals, mantras and mandalas. (216)

The Songs of the Blind Minstrels

In this last monograph of the book, William presents the case of the ‘Bauls of Bengal’; a school of ascetics, itinerant mystic minstrels who lead their lives throwing away all the conventions and systems of the main stream society. William visits the annual festival of the Bauls on which they leave their wandering and converge on Kenduli, a place north to Shantiniketan in West Bengal. He traces the life of Kanai, the blind minstrel and his fellow Bauls; and through their life details and their songs, seems to indicate that whole Baul school has its foundations on a sort of revolt against the existing social orders and practises of inequalities and discriminations. William notes,

Throughout their 500-year history, the Bauls of Bengal have refused to conform to the conventions of caste-conscious Bengali society. Subversive and seductive, wild and abandoned, they have preserved a series of esoteric spiritual teachings on breathing techniques, sex, asceticism, philosophy and mystical devotion. They have also amassed a treasury of beautifully melancholic and often enigmatic teaching songs which help map out their path to inner vision. (235)

The Bauls have altogether rejected the need of the idols and temples in order to grace and secure the divine favours as these set of systems have become the abode of entire exercise of inequalities. They have also denied in the philosophies of securing a place in the heavens by adopting a certain conventionally guided paths, rather they believe and preach the village folks “that God is found not in a stone or bronze idol, or in heavens, or even in the afterlife, but in the present moment, in the body of a man or woman who seeks the truth; all that is required is that you give up your possessions, take up the life of road, find a guru and adhere to the path of love” (235). William notes that the Bauls have drawn the elements of their philosophy from many different cults and religions such as Sufism, Tantra, Shakta, Sahajiya, Vaishnavism and Buddhism, and they adore the deities like Krishna or Kali. They sometimes visit the temple sites and wayside shrines - “but only as helpful symbols and signposts along a road to Enlightenment, never as an end in themselves” (235)

The Bauls, William notes, travel from place to place, attracting public attention with their distinctive patchwork robe known as ‘*alkhalla*’, and their songs which they sing in the accompaniment of *ektara* or *dotara* (musical instrument).

William brings in the historic and ancient Indian practices to justify the near atheist ways adopted by the school of Bauls. William cites the philosophy of Charvak and the *Rig Vedic* questioning of the real spiritual authority and asserts that such atheist practices are not new in the spiritual domain of Indian philosophy. The songs of the Bauls embody the real concerns that perturb the rustic life.

They sing of desire and devotion, ecstasy and madness; of life as a river and the body as a boat. They sing of Radha's mad love for the elusive Krishna, of the individual as the crazed Lover, and the Divine as the unattainable Beloved. They remind their listeners of the transitory nature of this life, and encourage them to renounce the divisions and hatreds of the world, so provoking them into facing themselves. Inner knowledge, they teach, is acquired not through power to others, but over the self. (237)

William came across and got interested in the Bauls of Bengal right at the time when he was interviewing Manisha Bhairavi Ma at the Tarapith while pursuing the details about the Lady Twilight of Bengal. There at the cremation ground of Tarapith he was introduced to Kannai, the Blind minstrel. The story of Kannai asserts how a boy of lower middle class family ends up as a blind Baul. Kannai was not blind by birth, but while a small boy he caught small pox and went blind. When he was only ten, he lost his brother in an accident and at eleven, exactly after a year of his brother's death, his father died of asthma attack. Two successive deaths came as unbearable shock to the family and for Kannai things grew worse as now he remained the only male to support the family. Initially, as he tells William, the things were simple as the villagers knew the family tragedy, so freely donated to them food, rice and fuel in the form of cow dung cakes. Kannai says to William, "I only had to say, I was hungry and I was fed." Kannai also narrates the incident of his sister's suicide thinking that she was a burden to her blind brother who would never be able to collect the dowry to marry her off. Kannai confessed to William that the suicidal death of his sister left him shattered; at that point of time he determined to do something for family instead of wasting life in the village. He remembered the words of Ghanshyamdas Sadhu who, when he listened to his singing as a child in the village pukur, once invited him to join him and that he would take him as his chela (disciple). Kannai even against the will of his mother and the other surviving sister, left home to join Ghanshyamdas Sadhu, who welcomed him, supported him and provided not only a place to him, taught him the ways of Bauls; and also provided him with money in order to be sent to support his mother and sister at home. Kannai also tells William that after the death of his guru, he went to stay at Tarapith where Manish Ma and

other fellows helped him getting married to a widow who was alone and did the duty of shoe keeping.

Kannai narrates to William, “Wherever we go, the people stop what they are doing and come and listen to us. They bring fish from the fish ponds and cook some rice and dal for us, and while they do that we sing and teach them. We try to give back some of the love we receive, to reconcile people and offer them peace and solace. We try to help them with their difficulties and to show them the path to discover the man of the heart” (245). In the conversation with William Kannai nicely glimpses the philosophy of the Bauls. He points out that movement of their spiritual journey highly depends upon the songs. “For us Bauls, our songs are a source of both love and knowledge. We tease the rich and the arrogant, and make digs at the hypocrisy of the Brahmins. We sing against caste, and against injustice. We tell the people that God is not in the temple, or in the Himalayas, nor in the skies or the earth or in the air. We teach that Krishna was just a man. What is special about him in essence is in me now. Whatever is in the cosmos is in our bodies; what is not in the body is not in the cosmos. It is all inside – truth lies within. If this is so, then, why bother going to the mosque or the temple? So to the Bauls a temple or a shrine has little value: it is just a way for the priests to make money and to mislead people. The body is the true temple, the true mosque, the true church.” (245-246)

Though Kannai is blind, he has no complaint for it. He accepts it to be as a fruit of his bad ‘Karma’ of any previous life. Rather for him it is a blessing that has sharpened his memory which enables him to remember devotional songs. Married to Aarati, he enjoys a life of bliss with her and has got four children from the marriage.

Life of Deb Das is the instance of how social orthodoxy can go to the extent of throwing away one’s own child out of the family. Actually Deb was the son of a purohit, a Brahmin. As a small child, Deb says to William, he did not find any great fascination for his father’s rounds of prayers and service to the idols. A continuous tiff kept on going between him and his father on the grounds of his mixing with the Muslim friends or the Doms (The untouchables) who looked after the cremation ground in his village. His father also objected his visiting the place of the Birangi Sadhus in the village. The things went extreme when Deb went to Kenduli mela with Sudhir Das Baul at the age of thirteen or fourteen without informing any one at home in the runaway style. When he came back home after five or six days, he was cruelly beaten by his elder brother and his father on the grounds that he disgraced his family by mixing with the Muslims and the vagrants. Still, in teens, without knowing where to go even without a single rupee in pocket, Deb reached the railway station and

boarded the first train and alighted at Birdhvan station. There an old Baul Sadhu gave him food, blanket and his ektara and told him to go to Vrindavan, the home of Krishna. Deb reached Vrindavan in the Toofan Express. He ate at a Lunger and satiated his days' long hunger. Then, the first thing he did was he threw away his sacred thread which gave him the identity as a Brahmin and changed his name from Dev Kumar Bhattacharyya to Deb Das Baul. After two years of wanderings, Deb says, he went back to his family to make peace but all that he received was a dire insult from his father and brother. Deb confesses to William that it was the lowest time of his life, on the train he contemplated suicide by throwing himself away in the river outside. But all of a sudden he happened to listen some other Bauls sing, they turned out to be Paban, Kannai and Sudhir Das Baul who had taken him to Kenduli. Since then, he says, he has been enjoying his blissful life of Baul. He also narrates his experience of great renouncement and how Kannai, a blind man, saved him with help of villagers.

William tries to bring out the secrets of the Bauls' practice of the Sexual Yoga or sadhana as they call it, but no Baul would go farther in the subject. "The Bauls were always happy to talk about their life and songs and beliefs but were not prepared to discuss in public the esoteric sexual practices which each guru teaches to his pupils when he considers they are ready" (255) William notes that the Bauls have their specific tactics of love making and ritualized sex which they use as an instrument to obtain spiritual loftiness. Kannai just touching the subject informed William that it was something like "a way of awakening and controlling the latent erotic energies from the base of your body and bringing them to the fore."

In the last part, William cites the case of an old Baul couple Laltha and Subhol, whom he happens to meet near a temple at the Kenduli mela site, and cites their words that it was music that provided them with the force of life full of solace and peace. To this Kannai says, "It (music) makes us so happy that we don't remember what sadness is" (260).

In many of his interviews, news paper articles and in public meetings as a part of the promotion of his 'Nine Lives: In Search of Sacred in Modern India', William Dalrymple clearly mentions that he has adopted a new scheme in this book. And he has been favourably received on this plain too. In his column in the *Guardian*, in connection to his scheme of narratives in Nine Lives, he asserts,

I decided to adopt a quite different form. When *In Xanadu* was published at the end of the 80s, travel writing tended to highlight the narrator: his adventures were the subject; the people he met were often reduced to objects

in the background. I have tried to invert this, and keep the narrator in the shadows, so bringing the lives of the people I have met to the fore and placing their stories centre stage. (*Guardian*)

Explaining his own stance as a travel writer, William makes it clear that he has tried to bring forth what was important and what would attract the major interest of the readers, and deliberately refrained from pouring out his own 'View points' and 'Analysis' of the stories being narrated.

Each of these characters live in the self contained moral universe of their own religious and ethical systems, I have tried not to judge, though my choices and arrangement no doubt reveal something of my views and preferences, I have tried to show rather than tell, and to let the characters speak for themselves. This may leave the book less analytical than some would wish, but by rooting many of the stories in the **darker sides of modern Indian life**, with each of the characters telling his or her own story, and only the frame created by the narrator, I have made a conscious effort to try to avoid imposing myself on the stories told by my nine characters, and so hope to have escaped many of the clichés about 'Mystic India' that blight so much Western writing on Indian religion. (Nine Lives Xv)

Back in the 1940s, Evelyn Waugh predicted the death of travel writing. "Never again, I suppose, shall we land on foreign soil with a letter of credit and passport and feel the world wide open before us," he despaired. Then along came Patrick Leigh Fermor, Jan Morris, Bruce Chatwin, Colin Thubron and a shipload of fellow travellers. The world, even after the devastation of the second world war and the invention of the jet plane, still offered a vastness and magic that stirred the soul and – through the pen of literary adventurers – set us all on voyages of discovery. And many of the critics hailed this book as a revival of the genre. (Rory MacLean theguardian.com)

As compared to his previous books, '*Nine Lives*' sets in tune with his '*The Age of Kali*', with the difference of the focus only. In *The Age of Kali*, his gaze had been fixed on the political and social unrest and the hypocritical practices in the Indian society, here in '*Nine Lives*' he presents ethnographic study of religion in India.

William taking advantage of his growing authority over the Indian ethnographical phenomenon, Historical studies and much wider social acceptance succeeded in attracting the audience for his books, through his stage shows, public performances accompanying the real life characters from his book '*Nine Lives*' at several Literary Festivals and Theatres.

The events surrounding the publication of *Nine Lives* serve as further examples of the ways in which Dalrymple transcends textual boundaries and negotiates his celebrity status. To celebrate the publication of *Nine Lives*, Dalrymple went on the sort of publicity tour that he has undertaken for his later books, encompassing a global itinerary of lectures and writers' festival events. Dalrymple also engineered a touring stage-show, featuring two of the more musical / theatrical figures in *Nine Lives* and other artists collected for the occasion. The program for the 2010 Sydney Writers' Festival claims:

Dalrymple weaves the story of his latest book *Nine Lives* through a rich variety of South Asian devotional music and spiritual transformation. ... Curated and narrated by Dalrymple, each element of this concert represents a spiritual tradition from his book." This depicts the event as a direct transposition from book to performance, reinforcing the experiential version of authority on which travel writing relies. The show purports to engage the audience with the characters within the text, although without removing the figure of William the "narrator". (Dorgello 258)

William is also aware of the social acceptance within or outside India, his own process of acquiring maturity and mastery over the Travel Writing genre, and the shift of focus and style of narrations with an eye on the audience of his books. In an interview, William clearly asserts that in his first book, *In Xanadu*, he wrote for the British audience, and was much welcome in Britain only rather than in any other part of the globe though it was translated in many other languages. His *The Age of Kali* received much severe criticism in India on the grounds that a foreigner commented on the Indian legacy of culture and political main streams. So, he asserts, he took up a different approach in the *Nine Lives*, and took the stance as he was writing for none another but his next door neighbours of India, and the subject too was a day to day concern of Indian life seeking divine favours for ordinary rut of life just as the Family of Mr Basu, at Tapan Sadhu's place, on the night of no moon day at Tarapith cremation ground, who wanted to offer the goat to the Goddess in order to secure peace in the family and for the good luck of their children at their studies or the different village families remaining ready with the thali of offering to the Divine Couple who have come to their doorstep in the procession on the annual festival of divine couple's marriage.

In the introduction of the book, William notes his encounter with the educated and cosmopolitan Ajay Kumar Jha as a wanderer sadhu, wandering holy man, made him look into the subject of the book more keenly. Then, he himself was on his way

to the shrine of Kedarnath, one of the holiest places of Hinduism. Here when he finds people on their way to the holy shrine displaying their utmost devotion despite the adverse climatic environment and the ways full of hardships' he feels the sheer contrast that on one hand India is developing on the all the fronts of trade and commerce, in the percentage of literacy rates, and the eye-catching infrastructural development and the westernized trends treading in the urban upper middle class, still, the spirituality and divinity has remained intact with the Indian social life. In India, William notices that the speed with which India has been growing from simple rustic clusters of habitations and the simple rural lore of life to the complex cosmopolitan urbanization and in such transition and transformation, certain questions pop up in his mind:

What does it actually mean to be a holy man or a Jain nun, a mystic or a tantric seeking salvation on the roads of modern India, as the Tata trucks thunder past? Why does one individual embrace armed resistance as a sacred calling, while another devoutly practices ahimsa, or non-violence? Why does one think he can create a god, while another thinks that god can inhabit him? How is each specific religious path surviving the changes India is currently undergoing? What changes and what remains the same? Does India still offer any sort of real spiritual alternative to materialism, or is it now just another fast developing satrap of the wider capitalist world? (Dalrymple *Nine Lives* Xiii)

In his talks with Anand Raj William clearly brings to the fore his idea of India as a Nation of variety and the inexhaustible resource for writing stuff:

India is so huge that after 30 years there is still stuff that I experience for the first time,' he says, alluding to the time he spent working on one of his most popular works, *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*, a collection of stories about nine people from across the subcontinent, each of whom follows a different religious belief.

I enjoyed working on that one because I experienced so much during the time I was researching the book,' he says. He met hundreds of people and interviewed scores of potential subjects before choosing nine. "Why nine? Because that was the number of people I felt would work well in the book," he laughs... (Dalrymple Interview with Anand Raj)

The new saga that William has opened up with his publication of *Nine Lives* is the adoption of new ways of attracting the audience to his book. For this, he innovated the concept of tour and public discourses and discussions not just in the monotonous way in which the author talks about his book only. But he presented on the stage the very live characters about whose lives he is talking in the book. Rory Maclean acknowledges Dalrymple's this motive behind aggressive marketing of his book in his review of *Nine Lives*: "But people are increasingly unwilling to be passive consumers. They want to "experience" narratives and to interact with the world – which is precisely what travel writers have been doing since Herodotus first let go of his mother's apron strings". (MacLean Rev theguardian.com)

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