CHAPTER TWO

CATACHRESIS OF LAND: CITY OF DJINNS

William Dalrymple’s *City of Djinns* published in the year 1993, is a well knit amalgam of travel and history. It is a kind of a cultural archive which combines within its ambit multiple strands of stories lost in time. Dalrymple’s foraying into the historical city of Delhi gave him a theme for this book. Mesmerized by the ruins of the city Dalrymple goes deep into probing what was the city in the past when the British ruled, and what it is now, much after the British had left. Delhi according to Dalrymple is a city disjointed by time. To collect information about this historical land and the lost times, Dalrymple visits different cultural sites and in the process he meets and interacts closely with people in their particular social and cultural milieu. A large section of this historical travel is drawn out of his experiences on this land and its people with whom he engages in continuous dialogues. This book was awarded the 1994 Thomas Cook Travel Book award, *Sunday Times* Young British writer of the year award. In the literary world it established Dalrymple’s repute as an eccentric and inquisitive researcher.

The field of literature and the field of culture act as the dynamic sites of power and resistance. In terms of representation in both the fields, meanings which a text attempts to put forth and convey are more likely to be ‘constructed’ and ‘collated’ meanings. The interaction and dialogue that happens to take place between the traveller/historian and the people with whom he interacts in this text, is heavily marked by practices of representational approach. Stuart Hall while exploring the issue of cultural identity and its forms of representation in a historicized framework
remarks in his essay - Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Identity: Community, Culture, Difference (1990), that such practices of representation are subject to change through a selective and interpretive process on the part of the historian (Hall 398).

This meaning marking process thus relate to the historically generated assumptions of the contemporary culture - a culture wherein the text is being read and is being interpreted. Hayden White in his book Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe (1973) argues in this context, that there is never a single and correct view of historical reality and by recognizing the possibility of shifting methodological approaches - we should no longer naively expect that statements about a given epoch in the past correspond to some pre-existent body of raw facts as in the archives (White 47). For we should recognize that what constitutes the facts themselves is the problem that the historian has tried to solve in the choice of metaphor in which he orders his world: past, present and future and this metaphor can be catachrestic in its character.

In a postcolonial and postmodern world of revised frontiers, there is a need to bring forth and debate such issues of cultural representation and cultural mis-representation. Noted anthropologist James Clifford, in his essay entitled Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (1986), poses forth the following questions: Who has the authority to speak for a group’s identity or authenticity? (Clifford 8) Here culture and representation both become problematic. It takes on a dicey position wherein it becomes an object of ‘descriptive analysis’ and of ‘critical dissection’. History as a cultural phenomenon finds in William Dalrymple a patronizing outlander who comes back to decode and recode a ‘land’ which his forefathers had once colonized. Dalrymple makes use of the historical mode in most
of his texts – be it travelogues or complete history accounts. His narrative thus presents forth a multilayered constructional framework, wherein extensive intertextual references to passages seem to echo out loud the ‘cultural representations’ of the lost times. This intertextuality in Dalrymple’s work calls upon the dialogic inter-play between the lost past and the found present, between the journeying and journaling process- wherein the land he projects is the land journeyed by him and reported by him. But in this act of reporting from the land and about the land, the authorial voice takes on a dominating recourse and the rest of the voices he connects with are rather underplayed by him. As a result, images when collected and decoded and then recoded with a selective representational approach may impact the lives of many. It may have a negative impact on voices that are either altered or suppressed or lost in dialogue.

In this book, on the part of this historian traveller there is physical involvement with the people but a moral involvement goes missing in Dalrymple’s writing approach. Here what becomes problematic in the historian, ethnographer’s, archivist researcher’s approach is the reconciliation of the real, the imagined and the imaginary. On one side, there is a Delhi with a magnificent past which now stands ruined and on the other plane is a Delhi with its relentless cosmopolitan metropolis. There is distortion and decay on one hand, and the antithesis to it is the grandeur gifted to it by the West in the form of education, architecture and landscape. Laurence Buell, a pioneer in the field of eco criticism at Harvard opines in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), that decoding physical environment as ‘land around’ not only requires variability but also the gaze of the observer, who then delineates this land. Dalrymple too, narrativizes land by decoding the landscape through which he travels as an observer
on “land” and in the process bestows meaning to it by means of his gaze. The historian travel writer achieves the motive of anthropological authority by directly surveying the life and culture with his ethnographic gaze.

Dalrymple’s *City of Djinns* thus becomes a historical travelogue wherein the personal and subjective accounts are interwoven in an interpretive manner by the catachrestic analyst- the historian traveller. In a larger framework of cultural representation this amalgam of travel knitted history of William Dalrymple serves to relate to different genres and forms. As a result the reader is introduced to history, to archives, to cultural studies (criticism), biography, archaeology, anthropology and to ethnography etc. As an observant of land, the position of Dalrymple can be likened to that of an ethnographer; and in the process of journeying and journaling through the “land” of Delhi he shifts back and forth as he learns from and speaks for the culture he represents. As far as the cultural representation of the land of Delhi is concerned, Dalrymple’s approach is a reflection of his relationship between the setting of this Indian subcontinent and his inquisitiveness as a traveller historian, as a cultural historian, as an ethnographic/anthropological historian and above all as a cultural archivist. Clifford Geertz in his seminal work on culture entitled *Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture* (1973) states that in the study of the culture, analysis penetrates into the very body of the object; we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to or think they are up to and then systematize those (Geertz15). Thus Ethnographical accounts are interpretative in their nature.

My critical study attempts to re-read and re-interpret the poly-layered travel account of the historic city of Delhi which Dalrymple attempts to not just decode but
also recode inadvertently or advertantly. As a part of the process of analysis, my study will identify and focus on the historical and ethnographic modes as dominant in the cultural‗re-presentation‘ and‗re-codification‘ of “land” in particular. The theoretical framework will also incorporate within its ambit postcolonial underpinnings and cultural and literary criticism. Taking insights from these theoretical parameters, this chapter employs an investigative approach on my part in order to identify and interpret the thematic rhetorical strategies which are employed by Dalrymple in the process of writing this historical /cultural /archival travelogue. As a result, the research here is therefore of analytical, descriptive and explanatory character. On a secondary plane, it will focus on and analyze the role of the traveller –historian who presents and then re-presents forth history as his-story (his version of all that he encounters on land). How archives are used in the process of this con-curing (mine emphasis) of this land and its past will also be a part of this discursive historical analysis. And lastly it will see how like the archives, memory too is a collated collection of the dead and forgotten.

In the context of oriental representations, Edward Said states that the historical and the discursive contexts are both imperative in the generation of any meaning / truth and in the practice of the representation of that meaning. In the process of ‘representation’ of the diverse ‘cultural markers’ (land, people of land, record) of the Indian subcontinent, Dalrymple’s engagement with the historical markers (informants, architecture, and culture) is pervasive and persuasive. This finds reflection in the structure of his narrative wherein the historic past is seen as continuously struggling with the remains of the historic present (in a range of myriad contexts on land). Ethnography, says Geertz, is quite similar to reading a manuscript from the archival remains. “It is foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations,
and tendentious commentaries”; written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaded behaviour. (Geertz 10)

Colonial history is romanticized by Dalrymple making use of technique of “strategic representation”. Shashi Tharoor writes in his latest book An Era Of Darkness: The British Empire in India (2016), that the British Raj is scarcely ancient history. It is part of memories of people alive. With figures like that of Iris Portal, the Haxby sisters, refugees and remnants of the British times (both British and Indian), Dalrymple tries to play with the nostalgic cords that still dominate the memorial boxes locked in the heart and minds of all these informants on land. This in turn acts as a kind of a ploy in the hands of this historian traveller who constructs an image of the Raj and British as benevolent. According to Portal and her informer Dalrymple, the British were the true ‘Godfathers’ to have ruled this land and its people. It was only in their rule that immense progress was made on this land as they contributed largely towards the development of this nation by bringing up magnificent architecture, grand monuments and English education. In a way they instilled a new life in this lifeless nation state. According to Iris Portal, the contribution which the British had made towards the development of the Indian nation was fatherly in its character; who took up the role of a paternal figure to bring up the best in it. She further says that the gentleness of the British is reflected from the fact that having performed their guardian role in improving this land and its people, they gently had retreated back to their mother country.

The narration of the British being fine rulers finds a parallel in the account of other characters whom Dalrymple goes on to interact and interview in the course of his visit on this land. The Haxby sisters, Phyllis and Edith Haxby are that class of
imperial British population who have been residing on this land since a long time. Dalrymple says these sisters have been putting up in a dilapidated cottage on the outskirts of Delhi. In the words of Dalrymple these sisters whom he had encountered by chance are harmless, struggling and mentally unwell. The plight of these sisters is brought to the reader by throwing light upon the Indian surroundings which is being ruled not by any high and polished gentries like their British ancestors, but by the low rungs of the society. They say:

There are prostitutes living all over the place, making life hell for us. They say we’re English and shouldn’t be here. After seventy-eight years! (87).

Here the duration of a long stay in India is emphasized upon both by the interviewee and the interviewer, and this further legitimizes their occupational status on ‘this land’ which was under their legitimate possession earlier. On the part of the writer/historian/ethnographer, anthropological research here is less of observational and more of interpretative character. In the words of Geertz it is winks upon winks upon winks (Geertz 9)

Selectively choosing the British remnants for his interaction on this land, throws light upon Dalrymple’s selective approach in his research (in this context). Throughout the text, we witness Dalrymple’s interactions being a kind of a ploy to appraise the present against a sanctimonious and a perfectly ordered past. In this manner, his writing is a pure reflection of mocking and satirizing the fallen present against its grand lost past. John Clement Ball in his work *Satire and The Post Colonial Novel* (2003), points out to the unwavering tendency on the part of the writer, to employ ‘satire’ as a means to ‘gaze’ into the nostalgic past in order to
discover in it a sense of pristine nobility, novelty and a pious integrity. In Dalrymple’s work too, there is a tussle where the lost age of perfection, is positioned in oppositionality to the grotesque and disjunct other. Eventually, through this oppositionality what gets reflected in his writing is the heavy use of satire. In this context, Pankaj Mishra in his article *Feel – good history: A reply to William Dalrymple’s response* (2006) accuses Dalrymple of writing not history but a ‘feel-good history’, a history of sorts – history that leads him to come up with his own generalizations (Mishra 93-95).

Therefore, we see that the historian accordingly selects and interprets facts and truths and then constructs narratives which are built upon his own (culturally or personally driven) considerations. Hayden White assigns the term “narrativized constructions” to all such narratives. White describes the difference between a historical discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it, and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak of itself as a story.

Dalrymple’s journey throughout this land is not portrayed by him in a linear chronological fashion. He constantly connects the present with the past. In his endeavour to know more about the past there is a strong curiosity for historical adventure- to dig more on ‘land’ as an ‘ethnographer’ or in the closed walls of the ‘archival domain’ as ‘an archival researcher’. Such cultural practices which intrigue him seem to be deeply rooted in lost past traditions and they find constant interplay in the findings of his work. The narrative in the hands of this historian shifts back and forth from the distant glorious past to a culturally dysfunctional present. In this process of shifting between past and present, we as readers witness dialogic encounters between the ethnographer and the ‘other’ who is under the direct lens of the writer/historian. Here the position of the ‘land’ under observation and the ‘records
of the past’ under observation become the prisoners of the powerful detractor (the author/historian/ethnographer/archival researcher) who detracts and retraces the path of information as per his observation and his own making. It is just like the Benthamite Panopticon, where inside the circular prison the individual cells are being constantly monitored from a single vantage point. This consolidates ‘containment’ and ‘control’ which are both power signifiers.

In this connection, David Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial discourse in Journalism, Travelling and Imperial Administration* (1993) delves on Foucauldian analysis of power. Through this analysis he comes to conclude that for the observer (in space) sight confers power; for the observed visibility is a trap. Spatial arrangement thus becomes strategic and plays a determining role in the unequal economy of any dialogic interchange occurring at all levels on land (between the observer and the observed). Thus following upon Foucault’s assertion that institutions and institutional practices like prisons simultaneously contain and create prisoners, likewise we see how the structure of the archives and the stories told by the authors (of land) is just like the panopticon wherein the historian is at the centre (sight confers power on him since the historical facts lie with him) and the records are being observed by him (visibility becomes a trap) to produce his-story (his interpretation); thus simultaneously ‘containing’ the land he has set out to present and represent in his work.

As is evident in his erudite style, we see Dalrymple drawing extensively from archived remains on land (in the form of memory) or in the archives (as records). In the process he becomes a historian, ethnographer, and archaeologist and also an archival researcher. Therefore in order to stitch his travel and history into a cultural
mix, Dalrymple brings in all the documentary evidence be it the rare manuscripts, microfilms, photographs from museums, miniatures paintings, history books. He extensively makes use of all that gets into his hands in order to decode and recode history and historical evidence (as records in archives or as records recorded in personal memories) as he encounters it. Therefore we see that unlike a fictional project (which employs a story level and a discourse level), travel history is more dependent on inferences and references thus adding to it an additional level besides story and discourse level; of drawing references to events or documents that can be cited about happenings on some particular land in the past.

This story level and discourse level is imbued with what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the Dialogic work. In his well-known work *The Dialogic Imagination* that was first published in 1975, he states that to a dialogic context there is neither a first, nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context - it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future (Bakhtin 170). Here he reflects upon the past meanings, and states that these past meanings are born in the dialogue of the lost centuries and therefore they are never stable in character. They always undergo reactive changes and are thus renewed in the process of subsequent development. Therefore meaning is something which can never be cast into a ‘finished’ (polished and complete) form. Meaning is something that one may derive as per the demand of one’s situation. Therefore, in any dialogic encounter there will be a constant negotiation between the observer and the observed (in land/or in the archives). This negotiation can both result in positive or negative output (in observation/in writing).

In Dalrymple’s writings too we witness that dialogue is everywhere; then be it in a direct manner or in an indirect manner. The personal visits on this land which
Dalrymple makes to the various historical monuments of his choice followed by his indirect reporting about the same in terms of their architecture is a kind of a dialogue. This dialogue takes place between archaeologist Dalrymple and also historian traveller Dalrymple. In his personal participation on this land in different events, there is a kind of a dialogue that occurs between historian Dalrymple and ethnographer Dalrymple. There is also dialogue between Dalrymple and the individuals with whom he is seen indulging in direct interviews and interactions – here in reporting of personal histories he becomes the journalist Dalrymple. And lastly there is dialogue between him and the manuscripts which he finds in the archival domains – here Dalrymple attains the role of archival researcher Dalrymple. Therefore, all along we see that there is the ‘creation of self’ through this dialogic encounter, where the historian /traveller/archivist/ethnographer/journalist Dalrymple like an observer is set out on his observational journey to decode and recode this land through his gaze and through his writing.

*City of Djinns* is all about “djinns of the past”. It’s an account that reflects the personal and biographical portraits of a wide range of people, who find themselves situated in Dalrymple’s single level conscious narration of the past. In his observational journey of Dalrymple what becomes evident is his journey as well as his journaling. This journeying and journaling on a close reading seems to be a reporting act, carried by one on a unitary conscious level. This level of single consciousness grants him an authoritative voice to celebrate or condemn the action, attitudes and the life of people on land which he journeys and journals through. Here, dialogue gets overshadowed by the dominating monologue.
In decoding India as a land of mystique, of the lost, Dalrymple’s narration of this land and its people, brings before the reader a sense of incompatibility on the part of the historian travel writer, who in his decoding process brings to his canvas pictures and images of this land which he as a British remnant carries within himself and that which he confronts and encounters in the course of his travel. Through his travel across the city of Delhi and through his face to face interactions with his interviewees, Dalrymple tries to establish a network of relationships with his environment. But this relationship is busticated the moment his research becomes one of “excavation” – of truth, of facts, of the last and the lost remains.

Dalrymple’s interpretive structured narrative is intricately stitched by him. It moves through varying timelines where the past and present blends. In the process he puts forth this blended picture of the city of Delhi highlighting its old ancient and its ultra modern characteristics. His maiden visit to the Indian subcontinent had glued him to a social and cultural milieu of the ‘postcolonial India’. Dalrymple confesses this feeling with great surprise. He writes in the prologue to the book that quite suddenly he had found himself in the land of Delhi- the historical city of magnificence that stood in its ruins today. He says that this land mesmerized him to the extent that whatever big or small happened to cross his eyes would cast immediately a spell on him. To Dalrymple, Delhi stood with its riches and with its horrors both. A ‘spectacle of a land’ dominated by ruined structures lying here and there around the city, scattered and shattered in time. It was like an anarchy that lay bare with press of people, choke of fumes and whiff of spices (8).

Writing about his stay in this land he emphasizes on the filth of this land in the present times. On his arrival he had landed up with a job in a home for destitute in the
far north of the city, but to his dismay when he would get up in the morning what he got to witness around him was a land, a city of filth, of dump all around.

Fig 2.1 The Cover Illustration of the book putting forth a picture of the filth and dump which Dalrymple goes on to elaborate in some of the initial pages of his book.

He writes:

The nuns gave me a room overlooking a municipal rubbish dump. In the morning I would look out to see the sad regiment of rag – pickers. He goes on to describe how he spent his days there and in the very next paragraph he says that he had preferred the less claustrophobic avenues of Lutyen’s Delhi. (8)
This draws a comparison between the new city and the old which was the gift of British Legacy to the present times and to the people of Delhi. The book reflects a conscious attempt on the part of the writer historian who is seen indulging in subcontinental culture and also there is a constant shift back and forth from being an observer to being a participant. There are accounts writ largely here and there in the book, which speaks out loud the plight of India as a land, and Indians and its inhabitants, being under the direct influence of England and the western ways of life. His description of the people of this land is focused on them aping the culture of the West, and then completely relying on the institutions and innovations of the Western world. In his description of his Punjabi landlords, Dalrymple muses over the gifts which are blessings from the West to the East. His landlords Mr and Mrs Puri are a Sikh couple, who in times of partition had entered India from Pakistan. According to Dalrymple, they were lost in this land as refugees and it was only after much toil and labour that they could achieve some shelter by the grace of God. And in no time they rose as the rich landlords in this land where initially their lives lay orphaned and amputated.

In one of the conversations with his landlords, Dalrymple emphasises as to how his pauper turned rich landlords were in awe of the western blessings to the land of India – the blessings such as the flush toilet and Star TV. According to his landlady Mrs. Puri the use of these luxuries have made life easier to the extent she says that Mr Puri cannot even think of life without them. He quotes Mrs Puri:

“He may have born in the Punjab”, Mrs Puri would say, turning to me, “but now he could not go back to the village life. He likes the flush toilet and Star TV. Everybody likes flush toilet and Star TV: How can you leave these things once you have tasted such luxury?” (13)
This emphasises and throws light on the inventions/innovations of the western minds that gave to the Indian masses luxury and comfort. But what about the comfort which they took from us? Dalrymple seems to have forgotten to highlight the same. Is it right to say that the luxury gifted to us by the West was the right way to cover the brutal doings of the British and their rule?

Dalrymple’s taxi driver who assists him in the writing and exploring of this land, Mr. Balvinder Singh is not given a very appropriate introduction by the author. The man belonging and representing the low rungs of society is described by Dalrymple as:

Mr Singh in many ways was an unattractive character. A Punjabi Sikh, he is the Essex Man of the East. He chews paan and spits betel juice out of the window, leaving a red ‘go fast’ stripe along the cars right flank. He utters incoherent whoops of joy as he drives rikshaws on to the pavement or sends a herd of paper boys flying into a ditch. He leaps out of his taxi to urinate at traffic lights, and scratches his groin as he talks. Like Essex Man, he is a lecher. His eyes follow the saris up and down the Delhi avenues; plump Sikh girls riding side-saddle on motorbikes are a particular distraction. (17)

Dalrymple adds to this that this is not his but his wife Olivia’s observation. He says he himself is ardently devoted to him. We as readers see an absent Olivia for whom Dalrymple speaks. This it seems he does in order to reinforce his orientalistic constructions of land and its inhabitants. Not just Olivia many a times Dalrymple is seen speaking for others. This places his writing in a hetroglossic frame. “Heteroglossia” according to Mikhail Bhaktin’s Dialogic Imagination (1975), is one
person’s words but spoken in another’s so as to express authorial intentions but in refracted ways (Dialogic Imagination). The potential of the dialogue thus gets marred and what the readers get is a fine deceptive crafted version of reality which can be and is mostly catachrestic.

After having given to his readers a ‘character’ (pun intended) sketch of Mr Singh, Dalrymple further adds to the above description that whenever Olivia is not in the car, he offers to drive Dalrymple to the famous G.B. ROAD - the red light district of the land of Delhi. According to Balvinder, says Dalrymple this place have ladies with huge breasts like mangoes. Later, Dalrymple in his work takes up contrary figures of the conservative British who ate mangoes ‘only’ in private and desired the womenfolk to do the same. To cover his contradictory statements, Dalrymple with all his skills of craftsmanship writes about Balvinder being a man of principles who had his own set of rules and regulations. He says, ‘Yet he had principles like his English counterpart, he is a believer in hard work’. Talking about principles, life of dignity, hard work there is a comparison drawn not with any other agent but the one and only who is and was considered superior – the English counterpart.

Dalrymple with all the skills of manipulation and with his art of writing presents characters speaking for each other. Dalrymple takes up the least burden of accusation. This is another clever catachrestic move on his part. Very smartly he takes inputs from various sources which contribute immensely in his purpose of writing about the ruins of this land – be it then about the filth or about the G.B. Road and its women. Balvinder Singh says at one point that the Sikh people are the hardworking class who after praying with all devotion do their jobs in a dutiful manner, then they drink scotch and best whisky, watch the television, eat chicken and
then prey and pry on the women of the G.B Road. This all helps Dalrymple come up with a picture that is completely a picture of disgust and debauchery – a picture so low which is going to sell at a god price on our own land, and on the land to which this travel writer/historian belongs.

Also there are references to the slow functioning of the bureaucratic and administrative set up. Dalrymple highlights the same when he refers to some of his applications under scrutiny being processed at a snail’s pace owing to the slow churning of bureaucratic wheels. Then there is also the description of the western morality overshadowing the traditional cultural habits of the people of this land. As a result of which he says that there is adultery all around, young couples are found in parks, and condoms are showcased on many of Delhi’s skyline banners. He says that the Indian capital was shorn of its traditional clothing. The morals and virginity housed in the houses of this land was bare out on land as the sari had begun to slip away unbuttoning the blouse much after the Victorian twilight had passed over. Here too we see that Dalrymple tries to find an easy escape. He first puts forth the falling and failing picture of this land and its people and on the very next move of his he attributes it not to the Victorians- for according to him this all is happening much after the Victorians had long gone.

Thus ‘djinns’ of the imperial times (the Victorians) in India, finds a constant recalling in the accounts of the author who is set to write about this land and its inhabitants. Accounts of the partition refugees whom Dalrymple meets in the course of his research and visit in Delhi, is an important point of consideration here. Writing about the partition refugees, there are instances where in the pages of this book we find direct and detailed accounts narrated to Dalrymple by some of the refugee Sikhs.
These accounts are full of pain, stories of separation, of blood and horror. These accounts coming directly from the partition survivors are also like the archival records. As they lie in the personal fonds of memory, they also act like chain of information that is built as a result of an event in the mind of the spectator or the sufferer, followed by storage and preservation in the compartments of the mind, recalled when one desires to be recalled and presented forth in the manner one likes (as a result of the personal and cultural biases).

Meenu Gupta in *Salman Rushdie: Re- Telling History through Fiction* (2009) suggests ‘memory’ to be a ‘trickmaster’ for it plays tricks on one’s mind and creates images of the vanished and lost world. The archivist in the archive also is like a trickmaster and so is a travel writer who is writing travel histories. He takes up images that serve to fulfil his purpose. The remnants under study, presents an interpretation of events which best suits their individual memorial compartments. For one it may be something and for other something else. This all depends upon ones memorial archival shelf – the shelf of records recorded by an individual in the mind. But in all this what is important is ‘representation’- the act, the execution, the outcome. Ella Shohat in *Late Imperial Culture* makes a deep observation in this regard. She advises the reader to not to swallow all such representations. According to her, every filmic or academic utterance needs deep analysis. This analysis should not only happen in terms of who represents but also in terms of that which has been or is being represented. She emphasizes on the role of a critic and reader to indulge in close reading, and in turn come up with some thought provoking questions like: what is the purpose of representation? At what historical junction the event occurred? When was it encoded, decoded and re-coded? In this act of re-codification what strategies have been employed in its structural formation and lastly what is the underlying tone of the
addresser with which he addresses his readership? This kind of interaction and debate is the need of hour when reading authors/ writers/ travel writers/ ethnographers/ historians who write and present pictures with their catachrestic representational approach.

When William Dalrymple pays a visit to Iris Portal who is a British lady staying in India since the time of the Raj, he is acquainted by her to the stories which relate to the class hierarchies that existed under the Raj. Before departing and taking her leave Dalrymple asks one last question from Iris Portal which without a doubt might have perturbed William’s conscience as a nostalgic British tourist travel writer on this land. He asks her:

“Do you think British rule was justified?” to what the reply stated by Portal is, “Well, at the time we certainly didn’t think of ourselves as wicked imperialists,” she said, answering slowly. “Of course not. But you see, although people of my generation were very keen on Gandhi and Indian Independence, we were still very careless. We didn’t give much thought to the question of what on earth we were doing to that country and its people. That said, I can’t forget the sacrifices made by the ‘wicked’ imperialists over the centuries—the graves, so many very young, the friends I have had, and what good people many of them were.” (80)

Portal’s reply to this question of Dalrymple helps him to present an overwhelmingly polished picture of the British rule. The “sacrifices” which portal emphasises upon puts the British in a bright light. According to her, the British were in nature a bit careless but even in their carelessness they might have contributed immensely to ‘this
land’ and ‘its people’ owing to their labour which had helped in the advancement and growth of this nation-state. She concludes:

But on balance I think you must never take land away from a people. A people’s land has a mystique. You can go and possibly order them about for a bit, perhaps introduce some new ideas, build a few good buildings, but then in the end you must go away and die in Cheltenham. And that, of course, is exactly what we did (80).

This is a strategically framed/propagated conclusion – both on the part of the interviewee who frames it, and the interviewer who then purports the same.

*City of Djinns* is full of detailed descriptions of prominent buildings, particularly those that were the brainchild of the British efforts in India. These buildings function in a similar vein as did the figures like Portal and Lutyen’s but they are more symbolic in character. They are the cultural markers embodying the British impact on the Indian landscape and sentiment. In the text, the figure of Lutyen’s who was responsible for much of the imperial British architectural presence in New Delhi becomes alive in the hands of this writer. The Raj is brought back to life in the passages related to Lutyen’s magnificent architectural manoeuvres. Lengthy sections devoted to Lutyen’s architectural endeavours are similar to psalms sung in praise of classic heroes. Lutyen’s buildings, lanes all stand out from the rest of the Delhi in the book. They stand for what class, architectural acumen and polished society is /was all about. An epitome of grandeur and splendour passed on to the Indians by its superior rulers of past – the British. Dalrymple’s personal response here beautifies the quintessentially imperial designs of this “jinn of Delhi” with whose architectural efforts and contributions the city of Delhi could gain weightage on the world map.
Cultural exchange is thus buttressed in the accounts where Lutyen’s architecture is shown as an exotic amalgamation of the classic and the modern.

The aggregation of the British with India’s rich cultural past, in divergence to a present that showcases a picture of filth and congestion, all accredits a surpassing value to the imperial encounter. The final word on the matter leaves the reader with a polished paternal figure of the British: “in its patronizing and authoritarian after-taste, Lutyen’s New Delhi remains as much a monument to the British Empire’s failings as to its genius” (85). Alongside its “genius,” the empire is described as “patronizing.” This is a condescending catachrestic representation of the British and their rule.

In writing about his visit to Iris Portal’s house in Delhi, Dalrymple describes her room as a small fragment of her lost world (her memorial past) recreated by Iris. The book shelves were laden with imperial classics—Todd, Kipling, Fanney Parkes and Emily Eden. On the wall was a painting of Dal Lake, on another a print of Emperor Muhammed Shah Rangila and beside that lay the map of Old Delhi of 1930’s which was lost in time. Dalrymple is witnessed by the reader indulging in this kind of indirect colonial nostalgic feelings throughout the text. Through portrayal of the British remnants like The Haxby’s or Portal he provides a justification to his catachrestic readings /interpretations on this land.

Edward Said’s Orientalism, time and again have thrown light upon the existence and working of such colonial discourse. His book is the bible which should be studied in depth in order to understand the politics of difference. It is one of the primary texts which pulls the attention of any literary scholar to the field of travel writing in literature, which itself is a kind of an ocean of archival knowledge. Said in his theorizing the ideological, cultural and discursive processes involved in imperial
domination had emphasized the prominence of imaginative geographies and their representation (Said 49). He went on to state that these go beyond the physical boundaries and construct fences around our very consciousness. He linked this concept to the politics of cultural representation and cultural imperialism. Thus, keeping Said in mind we see that in Dalrymple’s work colonial history and post-imperial nostalgic narration gets marked by heavy usage of unwitting double entendres, which provides easy laughs for a domestic audience at the expense of another nation’s inhabitants.

*City of Djinns* becomes a travel narrative of an elite Briton’s account of his first stepping on this land which was once ruled by his forefathers. It becomes a detailed account of the travel of Dalrymple to the City of Delhi, his exploring the city with his wife Olivia Frazer and finally being so fascinated by its charm that he eventually decides to settle down in Delhi itself. He writes about Delhi, that in this place on his visit he at once knew that he had found a theme for a book: a portrait of a city disjointed in time, a city whose different ages lay suspended side by side as in aspic, a city of djinns. The djinns, he says, loved Delhi so much that they could never bear to see it empty or deserted. Who are these djinns – are they the spirits of the dead, are they souls of the holy curators of our historical past or are they British representatives like Dalrymple who venture in this land on their own will and who don’t wish to leave it thereafter. Why this travel writing history is titled *City of Djinns*, this explanation surfaces nowhere in the text or in its Prologue.

In the prologue to the book, Dalrymple introduces *Djinns*. He says that these Djinns were spirits that were invisible to the naked eye and to see them one had to fast and pray. The term *Djinns* stands for magical beings. As per the legendary Islamic
fables most of the mortals are created by the almighty creator from earth mixed with other elements. Djinns are those beings which are born out of smoke and fire. They have been classified according to Islamic fabliau traditions into different tribes. The first class is the Jinn which is similar to human form. Second is called Jann – a tribe of Djinns who make their settlements in the cold deserts far away. Third is the Marid – a tribe of Djinns who are less in number but are very powerful in their actions. Fourth tribe is that of the Ifrit- a tribe which is mostly violent and most violently opposed to all mortals whom they dislike. Followed by this tribe is the Shaitaan, who aids the Ifrit’s in their violent actions. This class of Djinns have their abode either on the greatest heights of mountains or in the deep abyss of hell. Lastly, there are the Ghuls which is the most depraved class of Djinns. These Ghuls are the feeders of flesh; of both the living and the dead.

Out of all these tribes Jinn and Jann are the most good of all Djinns. As per the fables Jinn’s are the tribes who are intellectual and least magical. They have time and again aided the mortals and helped them in rising from any bad situation. Jann are the confidants of Jinn’s. They are conservative, individualistic in character. They have time and again helped the mortals. Marid are partial and sometimes violent to mortals. Ifrit, Shaitan and Ghuls are the deceivers and haters of the mortals. They ensnare the mortals to get their desires fulfilled. They indulge in acts which profit them and their self serving biases.

Probably in Dalrymple’s view, The Empire and the British stood for the first two categories of Djinns as all they brought upon this land of mortals was a stable, responsible, organized, rational, and a respectful tomorrow. The central thematic concern that pervades throughout the text seems to be an attempt of this historian
traveller reporter to present and re-present a polished picture of the British colonials in India. It is quite intriguing on the part of the reader that even after having washed this land of all that it possessed, and having largely profited from it, the British are still categorized as the indirect Djinn’s and are not categorized in the category of the Irfit, Shaitaan and the Ghuls. Dalrymple in his book indirectly puts up a picture of many charismatic jinn’s and jann’s. These are the characters that represent the west and its eccentric mannerisms.

In this connection, the characterization of the first British Resident at the Mughal court, Sir David Ochterlony can be taken into consideration. This ‘jinn’ manages to place himself on the pages of all the three texts of Dalrymple that are taken up for study in this thesis. The other jinn’s who surface on the pages of the book are William Frazer, John Nicholson, and James Skinner.

William Frazer was appointed in 1805 as Assistant to the British Resident in Delhi. Fraser is shown as a representative of the hybrid ruling culture which was overthrown in the decades prior to the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Quotes Dalrymple:

“While he [Frazer] slept, his bodyguard of Indian tribals would unroll their mattresses and sleep around his couch”. (99)

Another such character put forth is that of James Skinner. Skinner was shunned away by the British owing to his mixed heritage. But Dalrymple’s generous leanings towards this man are evident from what Dalrymple writes about him. Dalrymple writes:

When James Skinner raised his cavalry regiment, he had the Skinner clan emblem—the bloody hand—tattooed on the bellies of his Hindu recruits (128).
Another exemplary reverence paid to the British by the Indians is found in the mention of the description of Brigadier General John Nicholson. Nicholson had served as an army officer for the East India Company from 1840 to 1857. He had served during this period in Afghanistan and in Punjab. Nicholson according to Dalrymple was an enigmatic personality. He was known for his ferocious hatred towards the mutineers and to the then civilian population of Delhi. Dalrymple glosses Nicholson’s picture by calling him the ‘Lion of the Punjab’. The magnanimity of this character lay in the fact that even after his demise he was still worshipped for long as the hero by not just the British but by the Punjabi sect the Nikalsini’s who prostrated before his grave and worshipped him as their only God. This kind of a representation of the natives looking up to the British military leadership/leaders on this land paves way for the author to justify his writing of this land which owes much to the British rule for its superiority and their good sense of governance.

Forty years after independence when Dalrymple takes his journey to the City once ruled by the British jinns and messiahs, he is intrigued at the sight which this land provides him with. He sees a complete different picture where the contemporary Indians seem to have recovered to a great degree from the colonial hangover (mortals thankless to their jinns of the past) even though it was manifest in the fact that —people spoke English, played cricket and voted in Westminster-style elections (71) (all blessings of the West to East). In spite of witnessing people not reeling under the colonial hangover Dalrymple still finds out his ways and means to epitomize the great “jinns” of the West.

The nostalgic burden which Dalrymple is reeling under finds a further mention in his account of his journey to the hills of Simla with his wife Olivia. This further filters his cultural representation of the land of the Indian subcontinent. This short trip is undertaken by the author to escape the summer heat of the land of Delhi.
but in the whole process of narrating the trip there is a retracing of the footsteps of his colonial jinn’s. The hill station acts like a cultural marker, which in the times of today also serve to remind the native inlanders of the cultural distancing which the British in those times had preferred. Dramatizing his first glimpse of Simla from the train window, Dalrymple writes:

As evening drew in, we turned a bend and caught a first glimpse of Simla’s bungalows and country houses rising up from among the deodars of the ridge. Crowning the top of Summer Hills stood Viceroy’s Lodge, a familiar silhouette of Edwardian towers and pinnacles, a Scotch Baronial stronghold looking strangely at home only a couple of hundred miles from Tibet. Through an open window I felt the first drops of rain blowing into the carriage. The sky darkened and the hillsides grew grey; a wave of nostalgia crept up on me: this was not the torrential tropical rain of the Indian plains, but the familiar, hesitant, half-hearted drizzle of home. (315).

Here, the scenic evocation quoted at length by Dalrymple has profound infusion of the natural and the colonial cultural mix. The Edwardian towers and the Scotch Baronial Viceroy’s Lodge is described with all its intricate details. It is replete with all the architectural markers of the British imperial regime and its magnificent leftovers. In the contrast between the torrential rain of the Indian plains and the characteristic European weather, the author delves deep into the specific details of the enticing European weather. All such cultural markers make Dalrymple feel overwhelmed with his nostalgic roots and in no time he once again is bound to recall the memories of his home-land.
Thus the colonial hill station becomes a cultural site which was carefully chosen by the British and for the British to act as a home away from home – which eventually the British left but left it behind for the native Indians as a cultural signifier of the gifts of Djinn’s of the West. Dalrymple represents the cultural presence of the colonial rulers by referring to the Victorians and their penchant for replicating an elaborate British cultural setting in what was their official summer retreat in the subcontinent. He acknowledges Simla to be that land which had in the British era represented a different cultural reality in the imperial context. He reinstates his point by saying that it still casts the overwhelming historical shadow till today (much after the British have left) and in its European weather and its European architecture, it still reinforces the legacy of the colonial jinn’s of the past. He elaborates this through an objectified description:

…there is no mistaking the shadow of the departed English. It lies everywhere: in the shooting sticks, riding whips in the shop windows; in the net-curtained bungalows named Pine Breezes’ and Fair View; in the crumbles and custards of the boarding-houses. (315)

Thus, the picturesque locales of the hill stations of this land had offered a kind of cultural distancing to the British. The hills had provided the colonizer with the comfort of residential retreats as they brought to them the feeling of being home; even when they were away from their real homes. But it was quite ironical for one to differentiate whether it was a home away from home for the British who were here for some time, and ruled a land that did not belong to them, or it was the native in his own homeland away from his own home –left neglected and struggling for an identity and meaning of livelihood in his own land which had otherwise become a recreational retreat for the ‘outsider other’.
Prior to the arrival of the British, these natives and this native land is shown to be a land deprived of all moral standards. It was the British force who brought upon the Indian society a formal moral order and this eventually led to the progress, improvement and the evolution of this land. To throw light upon the moral degradation of this land and its people Dalrymple quotes the words of another British remnant, Norah Nicholson whom he had interviewed in 1984. He quotes her:

“I’ve been here twenty-four years and have applied for the land, but they ignore me because I refuse to give them a bribe. … There is no law and order and still less justice since the British left”.

(116)

This negative formulation of the Indians stands in oppositionality to the British, who according to Nicholson were the only upright and balanced authority to have brought order to this country. As a result of their efforts, India could become an oasis of order, of truth and justice. Therefore British had helped the people of this land to rehabilitate themselves from the dungeons of corruption and degeneracy.

The comment of the Persian scholar who acts as Dalrymple’s good guide in his journey on this land of Delhi, Dr Jaffery, reinforces such a view. He comments that the city and its culture and civilization have always been in very thin dresses. It does not take much for that dress to be torn off and for what lies beneath to be revealed (190). Therefore the text City of Djinns should be critically examined by the reader, researcher in this context of the lost history of/from this land.

In the writing and examining of this land and its history the picture painted by Dalrymple in his exploration as a historian /researcher is neither the inside of the event nor the outside of the event. Rather on the contrary it is a romanticized ‘representation’ on the part of this historian / traveller / ethnographer/ archival
researcher. Through his writings he sought to decode and recode the cultural strings of this land. His interest in the British and the ceremonial grandeur it embodied is what predates his memorial shelves; much before he had even embarked upon his writing - as a traveller and as a historian.

R.G. Collingwood’s comments on how one should approach history when examining it is well emphasized upon by him in his *The Idea of History* (1946) wherein he writes: The historian, investigating any event in the past, makes a distinction between what may be called the outside and the inside of an event. By the outside of an event I mean anything belonging to it which can be described in terms of bodies and their movements… By the inside of an event I mean that in it which can only be described in terms of thought…. He is investigating not mere events (where by mere event I mean one which has only an outside and the inside of an event…he must always remember that…his main task is to think himself into action, to discover the thought of its agent. (Collingwood 46)

Another critical insight of prominence here is that of Gyan Prakash who has critiqued much of Dalrymple’s writings. He accuses Dalrymple of writing history from a partisan bent and says that Dalrymple’s History is history that comes to us from a colonial biased perspective. In his seminal work entitled *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Political Displacement* (1995) Gyan Prakash reiterates that until recently, Colonialism and its legacies remained unquestioned largely. What comes to one’s mind as the immediate powerful challenging notions to colonialism are nationalism and Marxism. But these two too had operated with master-narratives which had placed Europe at their centre. He says that it is post theoretical tools of criticism which seeks to undo this Eurocentrism and its appropriation of History and
the historical subject. Criticism born in this process of enunciation of discourses of domination, occupy a space that is neither inside nor outside the history of western domination. It occurs in a tangential relation to it. This is exactly what Homi Bhabha have termed hybridity- an in between position of negotiation. The well renowned Post colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms it “catachresis” the deliberate act of inverting, distorting, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding. (Prakash After Colonialism).

It is quite a stimulating aspect for one that Mutiny which happened to take place in this land of Delhi finds no mention in the text or in the memories of the interviewees. Thus we can say that Dalrymple’s selective narration and portrayal may be driven by his culturally dictated catachrestic tendencies. The examples picked up by Dalrymple from the sources (historical as well as the people he interviews and interacts with) present an overwhelmingly unified picture of the charismatic British or “half-caste” leaders commanding undying loyalty and respect from their (native) inlanders. The memory of the native in-lander is thus played with. The memory here is like the archives – compartmentalized shelves of occurring of the past with which the historian interacts but what he presents at the end is /can be a version of the memory-distorted, displaced and catachrestic in character. Paul Ricoeur questions the status of memory. He says memory works only when aided by the third party analyst (Ricoeur 32). Memories of the past history and human consciousness are memories which cannot be taken as real realities of the lost distinct past. Thus, memory becomes a site of participation of human consciousness to write and re-write history.

Dr. Purnendu Basu who had long back held the prominent office of the Director in the National Archives of India in New Delhi, in his book Archives and
Records: What are they?(1960) writes about the difference and the role of all such records in the archival domains. He remarks in relation to the same:

The distinction between the administrative and historical records is a highly artificial one. All records are created and preserved by their creators for their own administrative purposes and never for the specific purpose of historical research. (Basu 24)

The noted English historian AJP Taylor too had believed that through a dialogical framework, the historians impose a self designed pattern on the events. In his book Essays in English History published in the year 1978 Taylor elaborates on the role of historian in the making of history. He says that History just cannot be likened to the catalogue of events which like a railway time table is displayed in a right order. It is a drawn out model of an event. And between the events and the historian, there occurs a constant interplay. In the process of this play, the historian tries to impose a cogent pattern on these events. No historian ever embarks on his journey with a blank mind as a jury is supposed to do. He does not enter the archival door with an immaculate vision. His picture is there in his mind; his vision is already envisioned as a result of his biased tendencies. He therefore pokes around and pries upon details which serve to thicken up his version of events and make them look intellectually convincing.

Taylor further notes that whenever a historian is working on his subject, the events or the statistical data or whatever he is making use of will eventually be transformed in his journey of writing. He may upgrade some of the evidence in his writing and downgrade other parts according to the changes in his perception. The cultural ambience of Delhi is not just the representation of what Dalrymple finds in
his journey. It is rather an affective re-codification on his part, of the monument and monument makers from different historical periods, which are read and interpreted as imparting voice to the city’s historic character. He self admittedly confesses, that it is this aspect of the Indian capital which makes it his favourite city which continues to invite him to her in order to be explored and be written.

Therefore, we as readers witness that the subject matter, the character and the story is already there in the mind of the storyteller. It is then the emplotment and the employment of the three, which is then culled out selectively and accordingly owing to one’s own cultural and personal underpinnings. This may result in purported written histories. Histories which fail to narrate events. The narration of events is marred the moment history becomes the primary vehicle for distribution and use of power. The very act of organizing historical data (in the dusty avalanche of the archives or in the open land- both under the historians scrutinizing lens) into a narrative structure constitutes an illusion of “truthful” reality. In furnishing a factitious neatness to the past, the archives and the history drawn out of it, can eventually serve as an indirect mechanism of power in any society.

Shashi Tharoor in his brilliant Oxford Speech talked about the British owing Reparations to Her Former Colonies. His speech was later given a book form with the title An Era Of Darkness: The British Empire In India (2016). This book is a critical study that makes an effort to examine the legacy of the British Rulers. It critically analyses the various claims that were and are usually made for its alleged benefits. It is a critical comment on the power grid pendulum that hovered over us in the past and is still hovering and overshadowing us in the present.

Dalrymple towards the end of the book harps upon the Mahabharata. He says that the more he reads this epoch history the more it intrigues him. He is left with
bewilderment, as to him whatever facts the *Mahabharata* states are not true and factual but are the creation of Vyasa’s creative imagination. The facts of this epic and Vyasa’s imagination become a cause of concern for Dalrymple to ‘decode’ the epic history. But Dalrymple should be careful, as memory is an illusion and so is anything that comes out of it. In demystifying facts and texts of the past, one can/may commit catachresis if the power grid pendulum is in his hand; for power constructs memory and it is power only which deconstructs it.

Therefore, Dalrymple’s work intrigues the reader with crucial questions of how this kind of pendulum of power grid which oscillated on the Indian horizons between the colonizer Djinns (of past) and the colonized mortals (of past) still deprives us of our true identity when we are being decoded and recoded in any form – history, archival history or as travel history. Dalrymple’s research on one to one basis (visiting and interviewing person to person) and his indirect and direct fact finding labour have benefitted him as a writer/historian/ archival scholar/ethnographer on double fronts. He has played brilliantly with the memorial compartments of his respective selectively chosen interviewees on this land. Pierre Nora emphasizes on the importance of the role which memory plays in order to record the past and its happenings. Nora is of the opinion that it is memory that dictates and following the dictates of memory history is written. But when that which memory has dictated is illusionary in character then history becomes a blurred history – thin, dusty and lost. In this book the memory of the people on land is decoded. Here the informants act just like the archives. Their memory can be likened to the partially faded manuscripts of the archives – full of dust, ellipses and gaps. With memory of people in his hand (collective and individual both) Dalrymple strives to build a history that has helped him garner attention of the western literary-socio-political high powers, and at the
same time within India too, it fortifies the colonial obsessions and hangovers of this land which he sets out to decode and re- represent in his catachrestic shades.

Thus to conclude, *City of Djinns* on a first reading is an interesting read but one which may offend the cultural sensibilities of many on this land. A non-catachrestic cross cultural dialogue is only possible when the traveller/ historian/archival researcher/ethnographer traverses carefully, keeping in sync with the sentiments of the culture which he sets out to decode and re-code (then be it with the memory of people on land or through the archived memories).