



Research Paper

Gazing At the East; a Critical Evaluation of William Dalrymple's "Nine Lives; In Search Of The Sacred In Modern India"

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Abstract

Travelers' expeditions, gazes, expressions, and experiences have changed the course of history and revolutionised ingrained beliefs. The Scotsman and art historian William Dalrymple, who currently resides in Delhi, frequently writes about his new homeland. The author of "Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India" travelled extensively throughout India. It concerns the large number of individuals he met there. The subject of his tale was the current Hinduism in India and occult practices. This study tries to examine how popular travelogues in the west portray India. This study shows how tourists to a country often concentrate on the mystic aspects of the culture, creating unfavourable misconceptions about the level of superstition and faith among the inhabitants.

Keywords: Religious, Culture, Modern India, Tourists gaze, Traditions, sacredness

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I. Introduction

India has been inhabited for approximately 3,000 years, and the frequent appearance of new civilizations demonstrates that it is a melting pot of cultures and a safe haven for many different religions from around the world. In his most recent book, "Nine Lives," travel writer William Dalrymple describes his search for spirituality in modern-day India. To call this book the Indian adaptation of the Canterbury Tales is not an exaggeration. The final volume features the stories of nine practitioners with a variety of backgrounds. They belong to various socioeconomic strata, practice various religions, and so on, but they all hold the same faith that the world is governed by a force greater than humanity.

Dalrymple's seventh book, based on his travels throughout India, discusses the lives of nine different Indians, including a Devdasi, a middle-class Kolkata woman, a Buddhist monk, a jail warden from Kerala, a Jain nun, an illiterate goat herd from Rajasthan, and a devadasi. This book delves into the lives of nine such people, each exemplar of a different religious path.

One might initially mock the outdated perspective of the locals, who are seen by the outside world as being locked in an old-fashioned mindset, but on a secondary level, one might recognize that it is a result of the writings of authors like Dalrymple, namely they are narrating as well as writing style. William Dalrymple is well-known for his travel writing and historical non-fiction. The author has produced excellent works over the past 20 years in his passionate desire to comprehend and investigate Indian society, culture, and history, including *The White Mughals*, *The City of Djinns*, and *The Last Mughal*. Even his other writings, such as *From the Holy Mountain* and *In Xanadu*, which delve into the exploration of different peoples and continents, have received praise on par with this. Dalrymple's obvious love of travel and culture shines through in his faultless writing, exquisite book covers, and lovely illustrations, all of which he makes with the help of his artistic wife, Olivia. In this novel, Dalrymple explores every corner of the nation in search of the final traces of magical India. It would be easy to write off *Nine Lives* as a cynical attempt to market exotica, given that Westerners have long held the misconception that sadhus and snake charmers fill the country.

"These Indian travel narratives must be understood in their terms, not merely as "other" too, or imitative of, European ones." (Thomas, 154)

The book takes an in-depth look into the lives of nine persons now operating at the extremes of religious ecstasy. It examines a wide range of religious sects and cults, as well as their rites and customs. Importantly, it makes an effort to comprehend the core of these religions and the factors that contribute to their continued existence despite the rapid transformations in the country's environment.

However, since religion is now viewed as a harmful force and a source of conflict, Dalrymple's interest in the "religious" in contemporary India may come off as a bit of a luxury.

The book "*Nine Lives*" explores the varied practices and rituals that come together to form India's distinctive spirituality. Although they have a long history and a dedicated following, Dalrymple alludes subtly to the fact that they are on the verge of extinction and are having trouble adapting to the "real" world that is all around them. William Dalrymple's journey through the entirety of the purlieu of the country served as the inspiration for his book, "*Nine Lives*," which is based on his travel and expedition experiences.

Dalrymple had encounters with various people during the voyage, and each of these individuals held a unique set of ethical and religious convictions. The book was subjected to a more in-depth investigation, revealing that various people have unique collections of beliefs, which direct how they direct the course of their lives.

a) ***The Nun's Tale:*** In his novel *The Nun's Tale*, William Dalrymple tells the tale of Mataji, a young woman who decides to become a Jain nun at an early age and later decides to engage in Sallekhana, or Santhara. A ceremony called Sallekhana involves fasting until death. In the tale, Jains held that sallekhana is a lovely thing and that by accepting it, one is accepting a brand-new way of life. To refresh your memory, a Jain nun is a person who practices Jainism. While they share Buddhist beliefs, they also have their practices. For instance, Buddhists shave their heads, but Jains must pluck their hair from the root. To continue, Mataji describes her life in the narrative from beginning to end, including how she came to be a Jain nun. As walking was particularly important to the Jains, they always walked together because they believed walking was the right speed for humans and prevented them from killing creatures. William Dalrymple shows a Jain Nun at the ancient pilgrimage site of Sravanabelagola who explains how she decided to practice fasting till death (Sallekhana) after the death of a close friend or co-Nun.

b) ***The Dancer of Kannur:*** Hari Das is a Dalit from Kerala who, for nine months out of the year, works as a manual laborer during the week and as a prison warden on the weekends. The story follows Hari Das's life. Only during December and February, the sacred Theyyam season, does he transform into a dancer possessed by gods even the upper caste Brahmins admire.

A huge group gathers around a bonfire and a carpet of flickering camphor lights in the midnight shadows of a forest clearing, with a little stream and a moonlit paddy field on one side and the darkness of a rubber plantation and the green canopy of coconut palms on the other. In the dark, most of them had trekked for hours. They are on the lookout for the yearly celebration where the gods put on a dance for Earth's human inhabitants.

Over the previous twenty minutes, the performance volume and intensity steadily rose thanks to a group of six half-naked, dark-skinned Dalit drummers. People have been pounding out relentless beats on goat-hide cenda drums using small, hard tamarind-wood drumsticks. Just now, one of the dancers became possessed, "*seized by the gods*," as people say, as the song tells the myth of the god about to be incarnated in front of the shrine in the center of the clearing. Now he spins rapidly around the clearing with a drawn sword in one hand and a bow and arrows in the other, strutting and jabbing. The mob disperses instinctively, seeking cover.

The theyyam troupe has taken over a palm thatch house located on the edge of the clearing behind the temple and turned it into the dressing room. An image of a female with fangs, resembling the goddess Bhagavati, and a red-painted face was the next dancer to perform inside. The summoning of the deity is about to begin as Supon is wearing a massive red-gilt, mirrored headgear. The young male dancer is giving his armor one last polish and arranging his headgear so that its facets will sparkle in the flames as he approaches the goddess.

However, the theyyam season is the only time they are revered and venerated. These individuals return to their menial manual work for the remainder of the year after it is finished. Dalrymple's rich historical, folkloric, and mythological incidents highlighted the study. Furthermore, the "*theyyam*" form was a response to Kerala's repressive, strict caste system, as is the case with all the stories in the book, where the social backdrop plays a significant role in constructing a faith. The Brahmins and Nayyars are frequently ridiculed and criticized in the theyyam legends for how they treat one another. The theyyam performers assert that their work has significantly altered how people view lower castes, and as a result, atrocities against them are now significantly less common.

c) ***The Daughter of Yellamma:*** The legend of Devadasi Rani bai, a little girl from Belgaum, Karnataka, who was given as a sacrifice by her parents when she was only six years old. A discussion spanning several centuries about how one of the oldest professions in India has evolved and adapted over time.

A sort of “prerequisite” for being a devadasi is being a lower caste member. According to a few studies conducted in South India, practically all devadasis are members of the Harijan (Untouchable) category (Tarachand, 1991). The lower caste status (usually referred to as Harijan, people who were designated as “untouchable,” or with the name Dalit, which means oppressed) and their place in Indian society are essential to understanding the Devadasi system. Lower caste women make up the bulk of landless laborers in India because, in addition to being consistently underpaid compared to their male colleagues, they also tend to be at the bottom of caste, class, and gender hierarchies.

d) *The Singer of Epics:* The story of the couple, Mohan Bhopa and his wife Batasi, who were the two of the last hereditary singers of The Epic of Pabuji, a major Rajasthani medieval poetry. The Singer of Epics contains the story of Mohan Bhopa. He is a traditional bard from Rajasthan who performs the Pabuli Epic, of 600-year-old poetry. In the study, Dalrymple offers a thorough history of oral epic storytelling in Europe, India, and family customs in addition to Mohan’s testimony. The locals look forward to Pabuli as a god and rely on him to care for their livestock and animals, making him more than simply a poem.

Mohan Bhopa, a bard and healer, is a member of the Nayak caste, comprised of nomads and positioned at the bottom of the caste structure. Together with his wife, he sings the 4,000-line epic about Pabuji, the mythical hero of their hometown. As with Hari Das, this role of his any other line of work provides Mohan Bhopa renown, respect, and a decent earning, all of which are things he wouldn’t have had access to if he had pursued. In the study, caste and class distinctions and the practice of untouchability play important roles. The focus is maintained throughout on his social rank and caste, which culminates with his tragic death, which Dalrymple underlines as an additional example of the restricted access to healthcare available to the less affluent.

e) *The Red Fairy:* Story of Lal Peri, a Muslim woman from Bihar, India, who now resides in the Sufi Dargah of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Rural Sindh, Pakistan. The ongoing confrontation between traditional Islam and Sufism, which is more secular, relates to Following Lal Shahbaz Qalander and Shah Abdul Latif, the story of Lal Pari, a Sufi fakir who lived in Sindh, Pakistan. She was raised in Bihar, India, during the partition, when her father went away, and her stepfather was also killed in the conflict. Her past is interesting. When fighting between West Pakistan and East Pakistan erupted, the family crossed the border into East Pakistan (Bangladesh) with the assistance of an uncle. Lal Pari and her brother decided to leave the family and travel to Multan, in Punjabi Pakistan, after receiving a land offer in the south of (West) Pakistan. Instead of receiving free land, they were given jobs in manufacturing and paid Rs 15 for eight hours of work. She eventually left after 10 years to become a wandering Sufi.

Despite how fascinating her story is, Dalrymple describes the most compelling aspect of it as the complex three-cornered relationship between Hinduism, Sufi Islam, and Islamic orthodoxy - in which the determination of the Sufi’s to absorb Hindu ideas and practices has always clashed with the wish of the orthodox to root them out as dangerous and deviant impurities.

f) *The Monks Tale:* The story of Tashi Passang, a Tibetan native who now resides in the Indian town of Dharamshala following Tibet’s Chinese invasion. How was it challenging for a monk to join the Tibetan resistance against the Chinese attack and take up arms? Tashi Passang is a Buddhist monk who recounts his life experiences in the book titled “*The Monk’s Tale.*” After the Chinese invasion of Tibet, Passang, along with many other monks, disregarded his vows, picked up a rifle, and battled against the Chinese.

In the course of sharing his story, he explains his early life and how he came to become a monk. He also discusses the invasion of China and how he was one of the people who followed the Dalai Lama on his journey from Tibet to Dharamshala, which is located in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. There, he enlisted in the Indian Army and underwent training intending to engage in combat against the Chinese; nevertheless, he was ultimately assigned to fight in Bangladesh. Passang has been doing penance for the murder by spending years of his life in Dharamshala creating prayer flags, and he has only recently returned to his vows as a monk at this late stage in his life.

g) *The Maker of Idols:* Srikanda Stpaty is the 23rd generation to carry on an extensive line of renowned bronze casters from the Chola kingdom. He was born in the Indian Tamil Nadu temple town of Swamimalai. In the year 2009, Paban Das Baul performed with *Nine Lives*. Srikanda Stpathy, an idol maker, may trace his ancestry to the bronzesmiths of the Chola kingdom in southern India. Generation after generation, his family has produced idols. Even though he is not a member of a lower caste, this narration references caste and the limitations placed on members of lower castes in the past, such as the prohibition against learning Sanskrit, which resulted in the lower caste members’ inability to create appropriate idols.

h) *The Lady Twilight:* The story of Manisha Ma Bhairavi, a devout follower of the goddess Tara who makes her home in the holy city of Tarapith in the Indian state of West Bengal. Referring to the fact that human skulls were kept and eaten as part of the Tantric rituals practiced at Tarapith. Dalrymple has also stated that from afar, the village of Tarapith appears no different than any other Bengali community, with its homes made of palm weave and its placid fishpond.

However, the large temple dedicated to the goddess Tara is distinctive among the neighborhood's other buildings. A chamber with strong red brick walls lies at its base; it climbs to a spectacular white pinnacle like the snow on a Himalayan peak, and an arcade of arches breaks up its walls. Inside, beneath the low-curving Bengali eaves, is where you'll find the silver figure of the goddess. She is half-buried behind marigold garlands and Banarasi saris and crowned and covered by a silver umbrella. She has a dot of crimson Kumkum powder on the center of her forehead. The priests will press their fingers against this and then rub their fingertips across the foreheads of the worshippers, leaving a red mark. Coconuts, white Banaras silk saris, incense sticks, bananas, and, to the pilgrims' amazement, bottles of whiskey are among the gifts they leave at her silver feet. Even so, everyone in Tarapith agrees that Tara's chosen home is not the temple but the cremation ground at the edge of the village, right above the ghats that lead down to the river. Tara is one of the wildest and most free-spirited gods in the Hindu pantheon. Because of this, she can't be confined to a statue in a temple because she can't be tamed.

She is not only the goddess of supreme knowledge, who grants her worshippers the ability to know and comprehend the Absolute, but also the Lady Twilight, the Cheater of Death, a figure of horror and terror, a stalker of funeral pyres, who ruthlessly slaughters demons and evil yakshis, becoming just as horrible as they are to triumph over them. She who delights in shedding blood is stained with blood and is fascinated with blood are all titles for Tara that may be found in the ancient Mundamala-Tantra, a hymn of a hundred names. She strongly prefers human blood, specifically that which is drawn from her devotees' breasts, foreheads, and hands.

Since Dalrymple has included the histories of each of these destinations and the mythologies of these places in his narratives, a deeper analysis of those mentioned above would bring a certain level of completion to the narrative. The casual mode of narration offers a pleasant read, but the gaps made, especially in this context, create a certain space as if an action has been done without any sense of logic as to why this crouching position is performed in the firstplace. Apart from the selective mode of elaboration, another aspect that does bring a level of distance is how one conveys the grandeur of his visual perception on the page.

The novel *Nine Lives* explores India's mystical heritage, metaphysical religion, and regular people thrust into extraordinary circumstances. Because these traditions are the last embers of a more compassionate and profound religious worldview from a bygone era, they have the potential to have a tremendous effect on readers. Certainly, this comprehension was far more liberating than the basic connotations it has assumed now. Also, renunciation and the search for the ultimate truth are perhaps felt most strongly in the aftermath of futile worldly pursuits, terrorist attacks, and other disasters.

While it's natural to notice similarities between cultures when one studies them, it's unfair to lump them all into the same bucket without first learning about each one individually. The author draws conclusions based on scant evidence rather than making a sincere effort to learn about native culture and customs.

The native population is frequently portrayed as being mired in superstition and blind faith due to the foreign gaze's preoccupation with the mystical features of the country. Visualizing South Indian identities in this way evokes a range of stereotypes and caricatures that are both unconscious and repulsive. Some people with deep roots in this view of culture have managed to keep a raw patch of originality, undamaged and unpolluted, alive in the middle of westernisation and the merger of civilizations. It's easy to mock the indigenous'old-fashioned way of thinking, which the modern world views as trapped in a rut, but it takes a second look at the works of authors like Dalrymple to recognise that this is the result of their narrative and writing style.

II. Review of Literature

Thomas (2019), in his work *"Play of perceptions: the south Indian identity in the age of kali: Indian travels and encounters and nine lives: in search of the sacred in modern India,"* drew the conclusion that foreigner's eyes were drawn to the mystical qualities of the country, reinforcing the negative stereotype of residents as being mired in superstition and blind faith. Several hypotheses and caricatures of South Indians have been proposed thanks to the identity-mapping project. Some people with deep roots in this concept of culture have managed to keep a raw patch of originality untouched and unpolluted amidst westernisation and the merger of cultures. It's easy to mock the antiquated indigenous way of thinking, which the modern world views as trapped in a rut, but it's also possible to see that this was a result of the works of writers like Dalrymple and, much more specifically, their narrative and writing style. Differences in language, worldview, and individual experience are only a few of the overarching causes of this phenomenon. Though Dalrymple aimed for objectivity, some passages revealed his biases against Indian culture. The inclusion of an unconscious layer prompted the reader to reflect on the ludicrousness of their society. The research aimed to expose his implicit prejudice through his openly stated interpretations (Thomas,2019).

Shinghal (2015), in his works, *"The devadasi system: Temple prostitution in India"* stated this practice is not as common as it once was because it is now illegal on both the national and international levels. Nevertheless, hundreds of young women each year choose this career path for various cultural, religious, and

economic factors. The fact that many of the devoted girls don't see anything wrong with taking part in the practice is a problem in and of itself, but the fact that "for the very poor and the very pious, the devadasi system can still be seen as providing a way out of poverty while gaining access to the blessings of the gods, the two things that the most impoverished crave," is even more problematic (Shinghal, 2015).

Nath (2013), in the study "Book Review: *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*" argued that the book's goal became apparent to the average reader as a response to the pressing matter of how to maintain India's rich cultural heritage in the face of the development and modernization taking place across the country. The playing field had been nearly leveled by globalization. The nine tales told the tale of an alternate India that many contemporary Indians assume no longer exists. Religion was a given for Indians, and everyone was content with their own lives and beliefs. Coexisting with these religious and cultural differences were initiatives to incorporate religion into the nation's overall identity. As the world became more interconnected, people tried to reconnect Hinduism and Islam with their country's unique character, using symbols from those faiths, such as the Hinduism of Rama and Krishna and Wahhabi Islam from the Gulf as adjacent countries (Nath, 2013).

Caroline., and KS. Meera (2022) argued that "India is home to various people and cultures" Discovering India was like delving into the cosmos. It was fascinating to see the wide variety of religious practices practiced worldwide. Every region, as well as the community, had its own set of customs. The spirituality and mysticism of India were revealed through an examination of the country's layered cultural traditions. Many different ethnic groups and cultural traditions coexist in India. The exploration of India was like a journey into outer space. The many distinct kinds of religious observances that can be found in various parts of the world were quite interesting to the author. Traditions varied greatly from one place and one community to the next. By exploring India's complex cultural traditions, one could get insight into the country's spirituality and mysticism. Dalrymple aimed to illustrate, in his writing, the disparity between the spiritual and material components of life in India. Dalrymple believed it was next to impossible to investigate all of India's religious traditions due to the country's sheer size. Dalrymple's selection of religions is limited to rather obscure groups (Caroline and KS. Meera, 2022).

Vijesh, M. (2022), in his book "*William Dalrymple's Nine Lives-In Search of Sacred in Modern India: A Semiotic Analysis of Culture and Language*" stated that the expression of culture through language. In most instances, it serves as the foundation for ethnic, regional, national, or global identity. Language and culture are entangled like the two sides of a single sheet of paper. Through a Semiotic Analysis of "*Nine Lives: In Search of the Lost*," this paper aims to explore Language and Culture. In this essay, William Dalrymple's "*Nine Lives: In Search of Sacred in Modern India*" could be used as a case study to examine language and culture through semiotic analysis. Language in this novel was used to identify each character's cultural identity. After helping Tibetans fight off Chinese invaders, a Buddhist monk spent the rest of his life manufacturing the finest prayer flags by hand as an act of penance to India. The author says a Jain nun practiced emotional distance while watching her best friend systematically starve herself to death. There were nine persons, and their stories were as varied as the religions they followed and the rich cultural heritage of the Indian subcontinent (Vijesh, 2022).

Gibbons, D. E. (2015) in his paper "*The Past Is a Foreign Country*": *History as Representation in the Writings of William Dalrymple*" stated that William Dalrymple's body of work mirrored a progression from naive travel writing to more nuanced and meaningful contacts with the sites and people of many Eastern nations, most notably India, and finally to what was maybe best defined as narrative history. Even for travel writing, this level of detail was uncommon, and it certainly did not belong in tourist literature. However, Dalrymple's approach had, if anything, become less aristocratic in tone. He had even been known to offer his services by presenting guest lectures on Indian history to chosen tour parties. In principle, his preference for using history as a means of representation gave the civilisations; he chose the opportunity to portray themselves. Although this strategy seemed to have the potential to minimize the focus on the other, it often had the opposite effect, and the first-person narrator, who was consigned to the background, proved to be more robust than expected. Dalrymple's cultural maturation from nave travel writer to culturally attuned historical commentator provides a possible unifying element for his body of work (Gibbons, 2015).

Johnson, R. (2018), in his book "*Theyyam: Caste Reconstructed and Reinforced*" stated that one of the most intriguing aspects of the Theyyam tradition was how it inwards the social order. People of higher caste kneeled to those of lower castes, who then played the part of deities, in what was viewed as a unique ceremony. Although it operated within the bounds of the caste system, this undermined the caste hierarchy. Its stories often took a stand against injustices like oppression and brutality. The authors have also been discussing caste systems, and it is within this context, Theyyam experiences a reversal of his social standing. The landlords are commanded to fall to their knees and lied face down in the dirt as he (the deity) speaks. The people are brought back to the social realities of the world, and the cast is reconstructed for a brief time and reinforced again. The worship of Theyyam, say folklorists, developed from the rituals of early agricultural societies concerned with ensuring a plentiful harvest. Mother goddesses, disease deities, local heroes, animals, and trees were all part of

this tradition, and so were the ghosts and ancestors. This traditional rite was a form of historical documentation of society since it blended dancing, music, and the deities of the Theyyam (Vijesh, 2022).

Paromita (2019) in her works "*Travelling cultures: religion, travel, and subjectivity in VS Naipaul's Among the Believers and William Dalrymple's Nine Lives*" stated that William Dalrymple's *Nine Lives* (2009) is one of several texts that questioned the metropolitan subjectivity of the traveler who arrived at holy places from a discursive foundation in secular modernity. This traveler's rationalist, post-Enlightenment notion of travel as observation, empirical experience, and knowledge was embedded in a conception of physical space as a tangible, homogeneous entity, and it engaged in an interpretive struggle with travel as associated with several metonymic categories. This study used the ethical encounter concept from Emmanuel Levinas, primary vulnerability from Judith Butler, and mimesis from Michael Taussig to examine how travel in conjunction with non-secular epistemes and praxes reconfigured culture, agency, selfhood, and power outside the confines of modernity and liberal individualism (Paromita 2019).

Divyendu (2020) in his work "*The sacred in modern India: William Dalrymple's nine lives as a delineation of demystified Indian spirituality*" stated that post-colonial India saw a breakdown and threat to religious identities. Spirituality and the sacred in India were tainted by personal reasons, politics, and economics like never before since the turn of this century, in stark contrast to what the West often perceived, idealised, and romanticised. Only a genuine Indian sensibility and an understanding that is honest and sensitive to India's varied cultures, systems, and its history can spot the gaps where the original qualities of Indian spirituality persist (Divyendu 2020).

III. Discussion

The south (Kerala) is represented in "*Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*" through two narratives: that of the devotees of the goddess Yellamma and a Theyyam dancer from Kannur. The native population is frequently portrayed as being mired in superstition and blind faith due to the foreign gaze's preoccupation with the mystical features of the country. The stereotypical and horrifying depictions of South Asians suggested by this mapping exercise are not intentional. Despite widespread westernisation and cultural mixing, a pure, unadulterated slice of originality has been carefully guarded by those who have a firm grasp on this perspective. At first glance, it may seem amusing to poke fun at what the modern world perceives to be the backward, unchanging ways of the natives, but upon further reflection, it may become clear that this is merely the result of the influence of authors like Dalrymple, and more specifically, of the narrative and writing styles they employ. Some of the broad causes of this phenomenon are linguistic distance, a more progressive worldview, and the influence of individual bias. Dalrymple attempts to maintain objectivity, yet his feelings about Indian culture come through in some passages. The inclusion of a subconscious layer prompts the reader to reflect on the silliness of their own culture. This study is an effort to shed light on the author's implicit bias, shown through his text readings. This study is not meant to critique Dalrymple's writing but to examine the inherent tensions between an outsider's perspective on a foreign society and that of the host community. If you use books as your only means of experiencing new places, reading a travelogue may be one of the most exciting things you ever do. The problem is that readers tend to overlook the author's role as the medium through which the reader's perceptions and mental images of the world are formed. The problem that hasn't been solved grows when the author is a foreigner who happens to research a given culture. This problem requires some historical context, so let's go back a few centuries.

When reading William Dalrymple's works, it's easy to assume that he's adopting the perspective of a curious outsider gazing in awe and wonder at the various systems he encounters. However, the problem is revealed in the author's subtle interjections of his opinions and the level of distancing he engages in. Dalrymple's book is a fascinating look into one of the world's oldest societies, told in a way that even a casual reader can follow along with, yet the narrative style also allows the reader to remain somewhat objective.

Though it may be inadvertent, when comparing one occurrence to another, the focus tends to shift away from the subject being compared to and toward the object being compared to unless one provides several sources of comparison. As a result, the identity it protects is jeopardised since the mental picture it paints for the reader is skewed. It happens elsewhere as well, but the point is that the author, rather than concentrating on the uniqueness of the structure, adds details that remind him of something else but don't quite measure up to the grandiosity of the original, giving the reader a skewed impression of reality. A defining characteristic of India is its openness to people of different faiths, linguistic backgrounds, and cultural traditions. This shows the narrowness of Dalrymple's worldview, as the natives may refer to his perception of irony as tolerance. His observation is potentially harmful because it further fuels hostility between faiths. Colonialism's tendency to fortify structures, which inevitably upsets the established order, was one of the first causes of division. A non-critical reader may once again conclude that they can serve to forge artificial divisions among indigenous communities.

IV. Conclusion

To sum up, the above points are not meant to criticise or demean Dalrymple or his writings in any way. It also seeks to elaborate on his precarious position, given that the cultures he was raised in and the one he must adapt to are diametrically opposed. In this it has been analysed how the Scottish travel writer William Dalrymple (hence Dalrymple) constructs South Indian identities in his writings. Yellamma devotees and a Theyyam dancer from Kannur represent the south in William Dalrymple's "*Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India*." The native population is frequently portrayed as being mired in superstition and blind faith due to the foreign gaze's preoccupation with the mystical features of the country. The stereotypical and horrifying depictions of South Asians suggested by this mapping exercise are not intentional. There remains a raw patch of originality amidst the westernisation and merger of civilizations, untouched and unpolluted, retained by people anchored in this way of thinking. At first glance, it may seem amusing to poke fun at what the modern world perceives to be the backward, unchanging ways of the natives, but upon further reflection, it may become clear that this is merely the result of the influence of authors like Dalrymple, and more specifically, of the narrative and writing styles they employ.

Some of the broad causes of this phenomenon are linguistic distance, a more progressive worldview, and the influence of individual bias. Dalrymple attempts to maintain objectivity, yet his feelings about Indian culture come through in some passages. The inclusion of a subconscious layer prompts the reader to reflect on the silliness of their own culture. This research is an effort to shed light on the author's implicit bias, shown through his text readings. This is not meant to be a criticism of Dalrymple's writing but rather a comment on the inherent tensions that arise when an outsider attempts to interpret a foreign society through the lens of those who live there.

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