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WILLIAM DALRYMPLE AND HIS NEW HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS REFLECTED IN THE
NOVEL 'CITY OF DJINNS'

A.SAVITRI

Assistant Professor, Tirumala Engineering College (Affiliated to JNTU Kakinada),
Jonnalagadda, Narasaraopet



A.SAVITRI

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ABSTRACT

William Darlymple is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Asiatic Society. He is known for his travel writings and narrative histories. This article examines Darlymple's narrative from a New Historical Perspective in order to map the relationship between past and present. It focuses on the dual technique that Darlymple applied in his representation of history of Delhi. Firstly, It highlights the point how he tries to convince his readers that British Colonialism is stable, benevolent and well balanced. Secondly, it focuses 'City of Djinnns' as a travel account. Thirdly, it concentrates on the reference of literary and non-literary sources used by Darlymple proving him as a 'New Historicist'

Key words: Darlymple, New Historical Perspective, Travel account, dual technique.

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INTRODUCTION

City of Djinnns is a sympathetic and engaging portrait of the age old city of Delhi. It is very intricately organized, ostensibly structured historical narration. The djinnns are spirits, invisible to the naked eye. To see them one has to fast and pray. Though it had been burned by invaders again and again, Delhi was rebuilt. It rose like a phoenix from the fire.

Darlymple writing's are primarily historical narratives. He developed his text with history deployed through a series of stories about various characters encountered by William who are in turn linked to historical figures and events. A new style, confidence, exactitude is embedded in his narration. His books reveal his passion for history, specifically on Indian History. It is this passion that impelled him to take up history of Delhi as his second project. He covers myriad stories about the Great Mughal rulers, the British, Partition and Independence. In the same breath, it contains the features of travel writing. To gather resources to his project, he travelled all over the country, conversed on various facets with the people who are directly related to the event or heard about it. Darlymple himself claims in the early part of the text book : " All the different ages of man were represented in the people of the city. Different millennia co- existed side by side" (9)This unusual amalgamation of travel and historical accounts reveal Dalrymple's dual approach in 'City of Djinnns'. It is both a historical narrative and a travel account.

Dual approach in characterization

Firstly, the duality is evident in Darlymple's representation of various characters and the events related to them. Darlymple tries to create in readers an impression that the British during their imperial rule, always tried to be friendly with the natives taking care not to ruffle their feeling. On the other hand, they adopted Indian culture and its ways of life. He named them as 'White Mughals' as they are the people belongs to Western country but absorbed and adopted Indian Culture. Few such characters whom Darlymple focuses are James Skinner, William Fraser and Orchetorlony. He perused more than 26 papers to write the history of William Fraser. Fraser adopted customs and dress of the Indians from the very beginning of his residence in Indian sub continent.

An early picture shows him sitting in a long Indian robe, a sash around his waist, while on his head he sports a curious Scottish tam O'Shanter" Darlymple 2004: 106

Fraser gave up eating pork and beef and had grown a thick Rajput beard. Lady Nugent, the wife of the 'British Commander-in-Chief' who visited Delhi was shocked to discover Fraser.

She thought Fraser was as much 'Hindoo as Christian 'and felt it necessary to remind him sharply 'of the religion (he) was brought up to' Darlymple 2004: 107

Like Fraser, Darlymple's has chosen another character who accepted Indian traditions. He was James Skinner. He received a title from the Mughal Emperor: Nazir-Ud-Dowlah Colonel James Skinner Bahadur Ghalib Jang always referred as Sikander Sahib by Delhi Wallahs. He was always an engaging companion, an entertaining conversationalist, a builder of churches, temples and mosques. Skinner and Fraser were friends, business partners and brothers-in-arms. Observing the same path, Darlymple mentions another controversial character. He was Luyten. . He was an extraordinary man but intolerant and dislikes of all things that were Indians. He invariably referred Indians as 'blacks', 'blackmoors', 'natives' or even 'niggers'. He described the helpers in his architect's office as

'odd people with odd names who do those things that bore the white man'. Darlymple 2004:84

But Darlymple in his text tries to expose him as the person who did favour to this country by starting development in various ways in India. He particularly mentioned that Lutyen developed parks and roads at various important places in India. In Darlymple's narration it is quite clearly visible that he has played a dual role in convincing Indians that though there are certain inherent flaws in the administration of British rule, they helped us in myriad aspects for 150 years. He tries to show that development in India began with the efforts of the British.

Dual approach on Colonial rule: One can trace this dual approach at copious points. With his impeccable technique, Darlymple tries to create in readers an impression that British colonialism is not only stable, well balanced but also benevolent. The British, during their imperial rule always tried to be friendly with the natives. They mingled openly with Indians and expressed positive feeling for Indian people and their traditions. Darlymple appreciates his White Men for being liberal minded and for trying to understand the nature of the natives. He strongly believes that it is not all the Whitemen who is responsible for the split between the British and Indians but it is the evangelists that sprouted the seed of difference between Indians and British.

The Skinners at least had some place in Delhi Society, but year by year things only became more difficult for most other Anglo-Indians. Increasingly they came to suffer the worst racial prejudices of both Indians and British: The Indians refused to mix with them; and despite their fierce and unwavering loyalty to the Union Jack, the English rigidly excluded them from their clubs and drawing rooms" Darlymple 2004:131

This above statement proves that the life of British with Indians was pleasant in the beginning, and the situation became critical only when the evangelists pursued their policies. Throughout his book, Darlymple

shows sneaking appreciation for the British rule. He cleverly juxtaposes the India before British rule and India Post 1947. He also contrasts the Hindu and Muslim relationships of pre-partition days with those of post-partition days. Delhi, before partition was fusion of different cultures, languages and religions. There were no differences between Muslims and Hindus. They used to celebrate the festivals together. But Delhi, after partition turned deadly. Partition was a total catastrophe for Delhi's culture and religious fusion. The original inhabitants left. The aristocratic Urdu language has become the language of working classes. The words of Begum Hamida Sultan, a descendent of Mughal blood reveals the terrible and degraded situation of Delhi. She expresses her gloomy over the catastrophic condition of Delhi in her interface with Darlymple:

Partition was a total catastrophe for Delhi. Those who were left behind are in misery. Those who were uprooted are in misery. The peace of Delhi has gone. Now it is all gone
Darlymple 2004:58

Darlymple's comparison of past India with the present India divulges his intention to support British imperial rule in India. His dual representation is visible in every part of the novel. Two variants can be located in his nature. One is his sympathy for Indians who suffered at the hands of White Men, and the other his sneaking effort to convince his readers that Indians stood benefitted with the technology introduced in India by British. He appears to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the British are not destroyers, but makers of India. His vivid description of 150 years rule of British in India displays his deep desire to prove the British as beneficiaries of India. He cheerfully expresses that India was obsessed with things Imperial.

"Such was the enthusiasm at home for things Imperial Indian that I had assumed that India would be similarly obsessed with thing imperial British". Darlymple 2004:71

And in the very same paragraph, he reveals his dissatisfaction that the British Empire was referred rarely and the colonial rule is looked as a remote age which is no longer in existence:

In the conversation of my Indian contemporaries, the British empire was referred to in much the same way as I referred to the Roman Empire. For all the fond imaginings of the British, as far as the modern Delhi-Wallah was concerned, the empire was ancient history, an age impossibly remote from our own. Darlymple 2004: 71

His oeuvre on various characteristics of colonial rule reveals his perfect use of the dual approach. On one side he expresses his regret for the imperial policies that were imposed on Indians and on another side, he tries to convince his readers that imperial rule left behind not simply grievances but also development in the form of technology.

Travel and Architectural significance: Darlymple's narration is mostly based on history. He developed his historical narration on authentic treatises. His interpretations in 'City of Djinns' are not wonderful flight of imagination like poetry-fiction and theatre but perfected, distilled and digested things with his strenuous effort. His journey in 'City of Djinns' has been one of discovering, learning, imbibing and adapting. His zeal to collect reliable records led him to research on stone buildings which represent art tradition from important dynasties that ruled over the erstwhile Delhi region—from the Rama of Ikshavaku to the British of 19th century. He visited the various historical sites and museums to bring to light the architectural significance of the past. He roamed all around Old Delhi rocks. An instance of which we can take from his composition is Mughal Tykhana:

"The vaulted passageway led on ten feet, then split in three directions. One route headed off east in the direction of the Jumna waterfront, presumably to the blocked-up water gate we had seen from the road. Another headed west as if to run under St James' church. The third headed south, in the direction of Red Fort". Darlymple 2004:124

Darlymple writes in his book that Tykhana is an important piece of domestic architecture built during Shahjahan. During imperial rule, it was given to the British General as a house to reside. Now it is used as an office. Darlymple met Mr. Prasad, (commissioner) to get detailed information about the edifice.

The edifices and the buildings visited by Darlymple reveal his laborious methods for the sprightly exposition of history. His peek into the origins of history of Delhi and its evolution into the present day are quite interesting. This type of architectural description with twists and turns offers great scope for readers to understand history of Delhi without a visit to it. His oeuvre on Delhi is a good instance of his maturity, deep understanding and hard work. His long zeal and confidence to come up with new work and fresh interpretations mobilized him to travel to any place to collect authentic records in the genre he expected. The 'City of Djinns' is not simply a historical narration but a travel record. He traverses the Indian landscape to provide micro and macro details of its history. His 'City of Djinns' is also the tale of a traveler who journeys around the territory. His stopovers are marked by only specially composed pieces that reflect the history of its origin. He even refers to the travel accounts of two European travelers Bernier and Mannucci, which are packed with scandalous street gossips of Mughals and also the accounts of Ahmad-Ali-Khan. His book 'Twilight in Delhi' is a fiction on life and culture of pre-war Delhi. He did not draw boundaries to his research activity with literary references but he also referred to the various letters, papers, petitions and diaries written by kings, generals and also common people. Darlymple mentions in his book elaborately about his references to various letters, petitions and papers founded in Monaic building:

"There were piles of letters, bound up in separate groups of ten or fifteen. The epistles were written on thick parchment in a wild early nineteenth century scrawl. Darlymple 2004:101

CONCLUSION

Darlymple's references to various literary and non – literary sources prove him as a "New Historicist" who deliberately follows the principles of 'New Historicism', a new theory developed by Stephen Greenblatt. Darlymple's narrative techniques show him as a true representative of new genre in literature i.e New Historicism. Though he plays a dual role in exposing British towards Indians, he tries to bring the real history at every touch. It appears as if he believes that a striking event or anecdote has the effect of arousing skepticism about grand historical narratives or essentializing descriptions of a historical period. So he has taken into consideration countless views without neglecting any micro details. He tries to understand the present in the rocks and records of past. His ease at negotiating both the physical & temporal spaces of the capital makes him an ideal guide to its past and present. Succinctly, one can attribute him as the true follower of the concept of 'New Historicism' with no second thoughts.

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