

Thematic Concerns of Dalrymple

"In History there is a scale between those who regard it as a social science and those who regard it a branch of literature...I am closer to literary end."

William Dalrymple is a master storyteller whose main focus regarding writing style is to bring everything to life. His writing is full of vivid imagery, his scenes intriguing and enigmatic. He breathes such passion, vivacity, and animation into his historical characters such that they come alive. His goal seems to be to reconstruct and reimagine the past in form of characters, setting and events.

In his essay Lahore: Blood on the tracks, William Dalrymple begins his account with a vivid description of the early-morning scene at the railway station and his **narrative skill** as well as descriptive skills are displayed.

"It is barely dawn, and the sky is as pink as Turkish delight. Yet already, at 5.45 a.m., Lahore Central Station is buzzing like a kicked hive."

It's perhaps difficult not to find a narrative in a photograph, especially when the one capturing it is a writer. William Dalrymple says, ***"They come from the 'visual' part of my brain,"*** Dalrymple brings the images before the very eyes of the reader. His immense use of **imagery** is evident in his articles; a power to create mental images in the mind of the reader. In describing the building of the Railway Station, he refers to many places that are of great significance. The description of the building is highly **ironic** as well.

"It is a strange, hybrid building; the Victorian red-brick is the imitation of St. Pancras, the loopholes, battlements and machicolations are stolen from some Renaissance Palazzo: Milan perhaps or Pavia, while the towers are vaguely German, and resemble a particularly extravagant Wagnerian stage set."

The dramatic use of similes and the combination of visual and auditory imagery conveys the chaotic rush of people amidst the noise of the passengers, coolies and station vendors as they try to out-shout each other. The station building itself reflects Anglo European features of civic architectural grandeur.

"He brilliantly evokes the atmosphere and colour of the past times, writing non-fiction with the elegance and vibrancy of a novel."

William Dalrymple treats history as a branch of literature and combines both narrative and descriptive skills to reconstruct and reimagine the past till he brings together the old world that was lost. The descriptive skills that have been portrayed by William Dalrymple are enhanced by his visiting the historical places he writes about. He gives a vivid description of the railway, of both the past and the present condition in his essay.

"On the night of Independence the last British officials in Lahore arrived at the station. They had picked their way through gutted streets, many of which were littered with dead. On the platforms they found the railway staff grimly hosing down pools of blood and carrying away piles of corpses on luggage trolleys for mass burial."

William Dalrymple has the power to construct images especially utilizing the sights and the sounds. His vivid imagery is able to stimulate the imagination of the reader and create in his

mind the scene which he describes in detail. He is able to evoke the emotions of the reader using immaculate imagery.

“Before Partition took place the station was a landmark of beauty. The platforms were clean and the carriages were spotless. The people were calm and quiet. The staff were well dressed. The uniforms they wore were immaculate. The buttons were polished, the braid was golden and shone under the lights. All that ended with Partition.”

In the essay we see many gruesome details of the massacre during the partition of the Indian Subcontinent. ***“Soon after that the killing started, the slaughter began. Everywhere we looked we saw carnage and destruction of human life.”***

William Dalrymple's essays are not devoid of facts and figures. In fact the essays are informational and factual. The historical events are in significant detail, however the essays do not bore the reader because of all the humour and irony integrated within the lines of the text, and appear as a part of the story.

“When Lord John Lawrence broke the earth on the future site of Lahore Railway Station in February 1859, the silver shovel he used bore the Latin motto ‘tam bello quam peace’.”

William Dalrymple does not however compromise the story. He sticks to the facts and not opinions. In fact, his purpose is to inform and not condemn. His stories are open ended and leaves up to reader to decide the right and the wrong. He is objective in his essays and has made his works into an art form. The techniques found in his works include abundant use of simile, metaphor and understatement, with detailed descriptive and narrative accounts of several issues.

“He is very good at showing not telling: stepping back to let the subject reveal their own story.”

Dalrymple never uses the translation of local phrases and maintains the authenticity of the dialogue.

“Sahib, come looking. Special ok shop. Buying no problem.”

The tone of the essays is not bitter though William Dalrymple points out the cause of the issues and the parties to blame without being too critical. He leaves the reader to judge those who might have been the underlying cause of all the problems. William Dalrymple sees into the root of the problems and highlights the intentions of the oppressor in an insightful way.

“Yet the railways were not works of charity. They were sound commercial enterprises, and the private investors who put up the initial capital saw their money returned many times over.”

William Dalrymple is one of the most successful essayists who combines the past with the present and does not tell but shows the reader both the history, because virtue heard might be forgotten but virtue experienced can never be forgotten He covers the present undertakings and the possible future from several aspects of the social, economic and political issues of the various regions of the world.

“Dalrymple’s work illuminates sub-continent’s past and present in all its baffling beauty.”

Style of William Dalrymple

Dubbed a "master storyteller" by *The Independent*, William Dalrymple is a renowned historian, bestselling author, essayist, curator, and co-founder and co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival, the largest literary festival in the world. The author of nine books, Dalrymple documents journeys across continents and centuries, exposing intricate interplays between culture, religion, and politics, while unearthing riveting, first-person accounts of complex historical events with respect and a deep humanity. His artistry and writing have been described as "**clear-eyed, non-judgmental, sober history, beautifully told**" by *The Guardian*. A renowned critic **Barnaby Rogerson** once said,

“William Dalrymple is a master storyteller, who breathes such passion, vivacity and animation into the historical characters.”

William Dalrymple has become one of the world's most renowned travel writers, with particular expertise on India and the history of British rule in the region. The art of travel writing has helped to both uncover parts of the world that few people have visited and add a new perspective to previously well-trodden paths.

“Dalrymple’s work is written with his own style of relaxed humour, often transforming a regular scene into one far more vivid and intriguing.”

Dalrymple has a great **descriptive skill**. He has power to describe sounds, places, persons and sights. He gives even minutest details of everything he mentioned. Also, he wants to reconstruct and reimagine the past by visiting places and even stays at that places himself. He also uses a **tinge of irony** in his writings. The irony he uses is mild rather genial and not critical. In his book “The Age of Kali” he describes the corruption of Anand Mohan Singh in a very ironic way as,

“Anand Mohan Singh was arrested but from his prison cell he contested and retained his seat in the 1996 election...”

Another important characteristic of his writings is that he **remains objective** throughout and get biased. While writing history of subcontinent he never condemns Britain, India or Pakistan. He only wants to catch the true essence of the history.

Symbolism plays a very significant role in the **titles of his books or articles** as they are symbolic such as “Lahore: Blood on the Tracks” is the symbol of British Raj in subcontinent and development. Also “The Age of Kali” is the symbol of the age of darkness. He uses many symbols in his books as well as in his articles. He also uses cultural terms from history in order to create the trueness in his writings. For example he used the term “**Kali Yug**” in his book “The Age of Kali”. Also he used the terms ‘**subzi**’, ‘**rickshaw**’, ‘**sahib**’ etc in “Lahore: Blood on the Tracks”. Also **Mary Russell** said about William Dalrymple,

“Dalrymple is a historian but a lively storyteller as well and especially good at recording the bloody details of this era. The reader is caught in the excitement... you will be both appalled and enriched, for Dalrymple takes no prisoners...”

The Age of Kali

Thematic Analysis and Justification of the Title

The essay "The Age of Kali" has been taken from William Dalrymple's book "The Age of Kali" which is a 1998 travel book. Its theme is trouble in the contemporary Indian subcontinent and the Hindu belief in a time called the Kali Yug when many problems will come to exist in the world. It is a collection of essays collected through almost a decade of travel. It deals with many controversial subjects such as Sati, the caste wars in India, political corruption and terrorism. A critic called this book

"... stylish, witty and bristling with insight, these jewel like essays string together to create a captivating and enduringly relevant portrait of the subcontinent "

The very title of the essay is very significant and refers to the Kali Yug or the Period of Kali (the age of darkness) which is the last of the four Hindu periods contained in mahayuga - the great age of the world. The age of Kali is when the imperfections are so overpowering that the doomsday is not far behind and a new cycle begins. The other ages are called Satya Yuga(the golden age) , Treta Yuga, and Dvapara Yuga. Each age sees a decline in wisdom, virtue, knowledge and life span with an increase in sin. It is believed in Hinduism that goddess Dharma symbolized by cow stands on 4 legs in Satya Yuga, 3 in Treta Yuga, 2 in Dvapara Yuga, and on 1 in Kaliyug. According to Hindus, Kali is the reigning lord of the Kali Yuga and archenemy of Kalki, the 10th and final avatar of the Hindu God Vishnu. He is the source of all evil in Hindu mythology. William Dalrymple calls the current age in India, the Age of Kali on the account of its moral, religious and political breakdown.

The essay centers around the **state of Bihar** which has been the source of medieval darkness for the whole India for many years. It is spreading moral decay, anarchy, corruption and caste warfares in the whole nation. William Dalrymple conducts various interviews and quotes various local news sources to explore the socio-political scenario of the state. He explores the disintegrating caste system in Bihar. There are some observations that he has very rightly made - India is struggling to shake away from the age old beliefs and caste system which seem to hold their fangs tight on the people very rigidly and refuse to die down. The unfortunate **nexus between the religion and politics** pushes the nation many times at the brink of volatile situations. The sluggish public sector is one major impediment in the growth of the nation, if not the sole one.

Dalrymple observed a quiet **social revolution in India**, with lower-caste politicians seizing power in state after state across India. This process seemed to have started in Bihar, in the person of **Laloo Prasad Yadav** who is blamed to be responsible for the massacre of Bumihars and other upper-class people in Bihar. The Brahmins had ruled India for forty-four out of fifty years. With Laloo's coming into power in Bihar, the upper class went into a rapid retreat. Laloo said in his interview to Dalrymple,

"Our fight is against the wearers of the Sacred Thread"

But this rising of lower-caste was seen as the age of Kali and the epoch of disintegration by the victims of violence promoted by the low-caste people. Dalrymple mentions the pessimists' notion that "the rise of rural lower caste has resulted in the emergence of a cadre of semi-literate village thugs, men like Laloo and his counterpart in Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, a small-time wrestler and alleged mafia don who has now risen to become India's defense minister". Therefore, after the rise of low-caste

"... Violence had come to totally dominate almost every aspect of life in Bihar".

A notable example of such violence is the public lynching of District Magistrate G. Krishnaiah at the orders of local MP, Anand Mohan Singh.

The economy of Bihar is so stagnant that the state seems to be dragging the north of the country back towards the Middle Ages. Despite being exceptionally rich in mineral deposits and fertile soil, the state remains the poorest in India due to the high political and economic corruption. Crime is also completely out of control in Bihar. "64,085 violent offences(such as armed robbery, looting, rioting and murder) took place between January and June 1997". The state has the lowest literacy rate, the highest number of deaths in police custody, the worst roads, the highest crime, and the fewest cinemas. The state has withered and is now nearing a situation of anarchy and complete darkness.

In conclusion, as the ripples of political and caste violence spread from Patna out in to the rest of north India, it seems to the writer that

"Bihar could be not so much backward as forward: a trend-setter for the rest of the country".

He calls it

"A kind of Heart of Darkness, pumping violence and corruption, pulse after pulse, out in to the rest of the subcontinent "