

**CLASS, CASTE AND GENDER IN WILLIAM DARLYMPLE'S**  
***NINE LIVES: IN SEARCH OF THE SACRED IN***  
***MODERN INDIA***

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**Abstract**

*The present paper aims at studying how William Dalrymple has delineated the vignette of Indian society, depicting vividly Indian caste system and people from different social strata. William Dalrymple, British historian and critic, writes mostly about south Asian countries like India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. He presents a new perspective of looking at these nations. His book 'Nine Lives' extols Indian spirituality and emphasized cultural diversity and unity in India but at the same time presents stark realities that vitiate cultural harmony in society. He has presented nine lives means nine people coming from different classes. He has depicted how they survive in adverse living conditions and how they can still enjoy the life. While describing Indian society he has paid heed to the down trodden class and women living under certain condition. The Dalit life is depicted in the story 'The Dancer of Kannur' and gender discrimination is depicted in "The Daughters of Yellamma".*

**Key Words - Caste, Class, Gender, Cultural harmony, Survival, Cultural diversity.**

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'Here is God's plenty', Dryden says about Geoffrey Chaucer's ' Prologue to Canterbury Tales' because Chaucer's dexterity has compelled many critics and readers to extol his work since his is an epitome of vivid description of characters who are from varied social classes. He has painted the picture of twenty eight pilgrims in such a way that one forgets that these are phantoms Chaucer's brain. One experiences the similar feelings when one reads William Dalrymple's 'Nine Lives'. William Dalrymple has delineated, very meticulously, a vignette of Indian society with 'Nine' colours. William Dalrymple, a Scottish born, living in India is famous for his book "In Xandu" and famous as a scholar, critic and traveler and historian. He is widely acclaimed for his "White Mughal". He has fascination for India and Indian culture and particularly Indian history. For his oeuvre he has been showered with praise by many including Kushwant Singh, 'Dalrymple writes about India with more knowledge and elegance than does any Indian I know.'(Telegraph, India)

His "Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in modern India" was published in 2009 and revised in 2010 is the seventh book about the lives of nine Indians. Starting from a Jain saint to a minstrel, each story explores one life from Indian society thus giving readers glimpses of modern India. While perusing the book one can easily get the feeling of being with the writer. Readers travel with him wherever he goes enjoying the region and the culture. The first story "The Nun's Tale" is about a Jain nun, in Sravanabelagola, who decides to take the ritual death. "The dancer of Kannur" is about, Hari Das, a Dalit. The third story is about Ranibai from Karnataka who is Devdasi. "The Singer of Epics" is the story of Rajasthani Mohan Bhopa. "The Red Fairy" is about LalPari from Bihar. "The

Monk's Tale" tells about TashiPassang from Tibet, it is about the conflict and courage. "The maker of Idols", depicts SrikandaStapaty in Tamil Nadu. The story "The Lady Twilight" is about Tarapith and the last story "The song of the Blind Minstrel" is about wandering minstrel Kanai Das. In this way he has painted the picture of Nine Lives living in various states of Indian. To read this book, is to experience the spirituality and religiosity of Indian culture but at the same time one encounters the stark realities of life. Conventions and old precedents are strictly observed and people are not willing to give them up.

The aim of the present paper is to show how the Dalit life is depicted in the story 'The Dancer of Kannur' and how gender is depicted in "The Daughters of Yellamma" When one writes a fictional or non-fictional work about India; one cannot ignore depicting caste system, the upper class and the Dalits. From MulkrajAnand's "Untouchable" (1933), Dalits are depicted in novel and other literary works. After Anand, Raja Rao's, celebrated novel "Kanthapura" (1938) too elicits authentic portrayal of untouchables. BhabaniBhattacharaya's 'He Who Rides a Tiger' too gives the fact of Dalit life. All these works directly speak for Dalits and against the caste system. In recent times RohintoMistry in "The Fine Balance" (1995), Arundhati Roy in 'God of the Small Things'(1997), Kiran Desai in 'Inheritance of Loss', AmitavGhosh in 'The Hungry Tide', ArivindaAdiga in 'The White Tiger' (2008) and Manju Joseph in 'Serious Men'(2010) have given brutal but to some extent the true picture of the Dalits.

In Indian society discrimination is seen on the basis of caste, class and gender. In a patriarchal society woman is always a subordinate in a family. She is financially dependent on the male members of the family. In William Darlymple's Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in modern India" the third story is about Rani bai who is a prostitute, a woman who sleeps with men to earn her living. She is an Indian woman who has been exploited for thousands of years. In Indian society there are many rules and regulations for woman, these rule make them nothing but servant. An Indian woman leads a servile life and this life is considered as her destiny. One can see the truth in Simone de Beauvoir's statement "one is not born woman but one becomes woman". Nature does not mean to make woman what she is. It is the society that imposes this image of her on her. Her life course is

decided by society, means by male members of her family. She does not have freedom to shape her own life. She has to accept without any grudge the decision made by her father or other male members. Rani bai of 'The Daughter of Yellama' is one of them, she is an Indian woman who resentfully opt the path of becoming a Devdasi.

Marx famously said, "Other philosophers merely seek to understand the world, Marxism seeks to change it." Marxism wants to bring classless society. Marxism has influenced almost all societies and writers, writing in any language of the world. Marxism in Indian literature has been quite profound and distinctive in the strong hands of master men. Since independence Marxism has been the greatest influence on literature that is written in any regional language of India and literature in English. This impact had been accelerated with the formation of the Indian Communist Party in India. MulkrajAanand, the Charles Dickens of India, with many authors from India, has acquired a niche among the writers who speak for the downtrodden. However the influence of Marxism did not extend beyond the delineation of occasional disagreement between the rich and the poor. The novels of P. Y. Deshpande, V. S. Khandenkar, N. V. Hadap, G. T. Madkholkar and the poems of Kusumagraj reflect influence of Marxism in Indian literature to a great extend. After some years of freedom the era of disillusionment as well as frustration began. The bleak age brought poverty, unemployment, social inequality and political corruption that have been upheld in Indian English literature. Marxism is deemed the only soothing balm to provide some respite from this namby-pamby situation. When one reads the story "The Dancer of Kannur" one thinks of bringing revolution in such a way in which the poor will lose nothing but gain equal human rights. While analyzing a work by the major tenets of Marxism, the division of characters is made in the following manner,

Proletariat – Hari Das, other Dalits and the superintendent belong to this class. Bourgeois – the upper class, the rich and Brahmins belong to this class. The proletariats, in the story, live in 'False Consciousness' as they do not realize the influence of the upper class. They have accepted the Hegemony to survive in the world. 'The Dance of Kannur' is about Dalit drummer, Hari Das, who belongs to the proletariat class. In Indian class system Dalits are the people who suffer

because of poverty. Though they have skills, prowess and mettle, these qualities are not enough as they do not have capital, they sell these qualities to survive in the world. They prefer to live under certain hegemony. In 'The Dancer of Kannur' the condition of Haridas and many other untouchables is pathetically described. Hari Das is the Velutha of '*God of the small things*'. Paradoxically, Hari Das has been doing the role of a god Vishnu for twenty six years but he knows that he only plays the role of a god; he is not god at all. For a while he can experience the heavenly life. For the short period he can enjoy the life of Gods. This act transforms him from an ordinary Dalit to a divine being.' When the headdress is removed, it ends and he feels 'the incision of a surgeon'. 'Becoming a god' is not a full time job for Haridas, he becomes god to earn money.

Dalits are constantly under fear of making both ends meet, Hari Das is one of them. Hari Das is that god who cannot control his own life. In fact as Hari Das says 'All the Theyyama dancers lead double lives.' They all do double duties besides being a dancer, Chamndi makes wedding decorations, and Narasimha works as a waiter, Bhagavati as a bus conductor. They are powerless, poor and part-time gods who are to strive to survive. What Hari Das does is not enough to earn living because his job of dancing is only for four months for the rest of year he must do manual work. He belongs to the class which has always been on toes to survive. For remaining days he works as a manual labour, as a warden. His words give us some insight into the pitiable condition in which he lives.

I need to make a living. I am poor enough to be ready to do virtually anything if someone pays me a daily wages. It is not pleasure it is a dangerous work. (32)

Hari Das, the jail superintendent are proletariats as they do deadly, hazardous work to earn living. The inmates of jail are powerful, rich people who belong to bourgeois class. The superintendent and people like Hari Das are there to harness the inmates but ironically the inmates who have political support control their lives and they have no option but to accept the hegemony. Hari Das is the victim of political and social condition. His skill is used to meet God. Hari is very much satisfied, he is aware of his untouchability but when he becomes god

even Brahmins touch his feet and that is enough for him.

Indian caste system allows the upper class people to suppress the poor, allows one man to rule other man particularly Dalit people who do not have right to show grudge against these things. Dalit and oppressed people are victimized by conservative, rigidly hierarchical societies. Mr. Nair a warrior class man who could instantly kill a Dalit person if he happened to meet one of them in his ways. Dalit people are discriminated on the basis of caste and class; they have to follow certain codes of conduct. They are still expected to bow their heads and stand still and keep distance from the people of the upper class. The only system that is free from this hierarchy is the system of dance. In this institution the whole caste system of Indian turns upside down. One can say that it is one of the models of Marxist revolution. Dalits become god and the upper class Brahmins worship them. But the upper class Brahmins decide which Dalit family will become god, means nothing is in the hands of Dalit and poor people. Even this has been harnessed by the upper class people. They are god only in names they are used as medium because this work of god is ascribed to them by the rich upper class people. If any Dalit dares to oppose he or she is punished for infringement of class conventions. It means the upper class people maintain the power somehow. This class system is maintained even in the Yallama stories so that no Dalit can dream of infringing caste system. Dalits are touchable only at religious ceremony. The cost of Dalit life is nothing; they are deprived of the basic human rights, sometimes even the right to live. The story shows this,

A Dalit boy of the Tiyya caste is driven by hunger to steal a mango while grazing the cattle of a high caste farmer. As he is up the tree and in the act of gorging himself on the farmer's fruit, the farmer's niece happens to pass by and sits beneath the tree. While she is there a mango that the boy has been holding falls on her, so polluting her and revealing his theft. The boy runs away but, returning many years later, is caught bathing in the village pond the farmer, and is immediately beheaded. In atonement the dead Dalit is deified and becomes immortal in a local form of one of the great Hindus gods; and it is in this form that he is still reincarnated

in the body of Theyyam, the angry spirit is propitiated and calmed the dead are redeemed and morality is seen to triumph over immorality, justice over injustice. (37)

Dalit people are not allowed to drink in the houses of the upper class people. They are given items to eat and drink with extra- long ladle to keep safe distance from them. The condition of Dalit has not changed so far. Dalits are people who do manual works for the upper caste Hindus, they perform deeds like digging well but they are not granted to fetch the water from the same well. This has been severely criticized in the Marxist notion of society. Dalit people sell their labour but cannot become owner of the product which is the result of their labour. Hari realizes this exploitation, he is not a Marxist or rebel but he speak about the injustice done to his caste by the upper caste people. People like Hari, suffer because the upper class people hold the land and wealth that is used to retain and maintain the class system. It is the ideology of the dancing class that makes Hari's father to opt dancing career so is the case of Hari.

Theyyam stories are like Marxism they criticize the Brahmin class. The story of Shiva and Parvati is an instance of Marxist way to teach the people in power a lesson. The divine being is needed to bring equality in society. The question asked by Shiva to Shankaracharya shows that in capital system the workers are alienated from the product which they produce. Marxists want common ownership of the product which is refuted by the upper class people. Shankaracharya wants to build another temple in which the God Shiva will be installed in the present form and the emerging society will be based on equality. The answer to abolish class system and discrimination is given by Shiva, 'You have to fight against prejudice and ignorance and use your great knowledge to help people of every caste, not just your Brahmin. Only then will you attain true Enlightenment.'(41)

Marxism believes that economy is the base of any society, to change the conditions of Dalit they should be made financially potent so that they can be treated equally. They must not be made part- time gods, and manual labourers to full fill the desires of the upper class people. They must be made free from the

burden of caste. In the story Shankaracharya is Marxist as he wants to bring the society in which everybody will be treated equally.

The third story "The Daughter of Yellamma" is about Rani bai and Kaveri, they are in the business of flesh. It is one of the ways of exploiting women. They are, like other women, in this business of flesh, not because they want to be one but their family pushed them in the name of marrying them to god and because of some drastic circumstances. In Indian society woman is treated as an object of possession and this object can be hired to suffice male sexual desires. They are Devdasi, like an animal they had been sacrificed to the god so that like Prasad from God they will be utilized later on. Rani bai was dedicated to the god when she was six years old. She says, "I had no feeling at the time except wondering, why they have done this" (65) hers was very poor family, her father wanted money desperately as he was a heavy drunkard. She was sacrificed for money. She says, "I had no devotional feelings for the goddess and dreamed only of having more money and living a luxurious life in a Pukka house." (66)

A woman can be sold and purchased like an object. She is treated as a sex machine by selling which possessor can make money and one who purchases the machine get physical pleasure but what about the woman who is sold and bought. Rani bai was sold by her father for Rs. 500. She says,

I knew a little of what might lie ahead for I had seen other neighbors who had done this to their daughters, and saw people coming and going from their houses. I had asked my parents all these questions and repeated over and over again that I did not want to do sex work. (66)

But she was forced to do this, in the name of religion she was victimized, her aunt tells her 'You should not cry. This is your dharma, your duty, your work. It is inauspicious to cry.' (66)

Though they are exploited they are not given monetary benefits. The man who deflowered Rani bai did not give the full Rs. 500 he had promised.

Nobody cares for them, not even their parents. Rani bai wanted to work on the onion field but could not live a life of her dreams, a normal life. She was sold and purchased, she became mother, had a son and a daughter. She settled in her small village but the life was very difficult and humiliating for her she says,

Once I tried to open a bank account with my son. We went to fill in the form and the manager asked: "Father's name?" After that, my son was angry. He said I should not have brought him into the world like this. (57)

This is not enough, they suffer mentally and physically, they worry about future since they know they will be useless after they will be old and ugly and their only way of making money will be ceased. This concern is seen in the statements of Kaveri, "When we are not beautiful, when our bodies become ugly, then we will be all alone." (57) Being in sex business they are in danger of contracting sexual disease, Kaveri says,

In my village, four younger girls have died. My won brother has the disease. He used to be a truck driver, and knew all the girls along the road, what difference does it make? I will die anyway. (58)

They are daughters of Yellamma as their fate is no better than the goddess. The Yellamma story shows how women are victimized and how her spouse dominates her. Yellamma wife of Jamadagni suffered the fate of Devadasi. One day while going to fetch water for her husband she saw a *gandharva* making love. Her suppressed desires erupted she longed for sexual love. Suddenly she lost her *yogic* power and she could not get water for her husband. Her husband, Jamadagni, cursed her for her sexual act of thinking and desiring sex. She became sickly and ugly. She is turned out of her house. She was never forgiven for her never committed crime. The story is a hard and violent. The author says,

Jamadagni belongs to that class of irascible holy men who fill

Sanskrit literature with their fiery and unforgiving anger. In contrast, the goddess Yellamma, like Sita in the Ramayana, is a victim, wrongly suspected of infidelities she never actually committed. Though she had been a good wife her husband threw her out, disfigured her beauty and cursed her to beg for a living. She was rejected by all. (59)

Now the vital question is what would have happened if Jamadagni was in place of Yallamma? It is a known precedent that in many cultures including Indian saint and sages had been deflowering girls. A saint is allowed to commit any kind of adultery but if a woman commits such adultery she is severely punished, her life is destroyed. Devadasi like Rani bai and Kaveri felt that they were the daughters of the goddess Yellamma because their condition is no better than hers. Indian women are victims of Indian cultural inequalities. They are Dedasis, they are respected, they are invited for the religious ceremonies, but nobody is ready to marry them. They are suitable only for extramarital sex.

The devadasi have long history; they stand in the direct line of one of the oldest professions in India. At the heart of the institution lies the idea of a woman entering for life the service of the god or goddess. The nature of that service and the name given to it, have wide regional variations and have changed through time: only recently most devadasi come to be working exclusively in the sex trade. Nowadays illiterate and Dailt women become devadasi. But there are some people who oppose this ritual of sacrificing women. Women should be freed from this inhuman tradition and let her enjoy the equality in society. Rani bai suffered a lot, her two children died before her and she has also contracted HIV. She is destined to die. What is life for her? Life is a long punishment of suffering and humiliation for her and for many others like her. The only crime, they are guilty of, is the crime of being born as woman. This is a catching motto for the liberation of women which we read in the book "DEDICATING YOUR DAUGHTERS IS UNCIVILIZED BEHAVIOUR."

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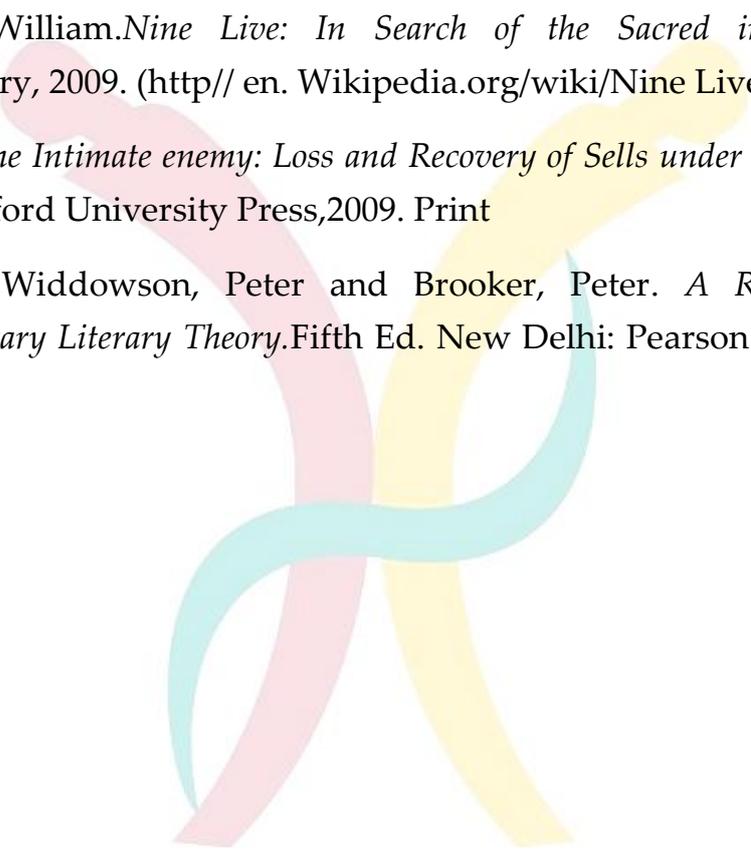
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