



## Mapping the 'Quest' in *In Xanadu* with Special Reference to "Kubla Khan": A Comparative Study

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**Abstract:** The ratiocination of Colonialism had helped in formulating a lot of literary discourses, and travelogues are the most prominent ones because of their documentations of the socio-cultural history of different ethnic groups. But unlike the other discourses, travelogues emphasise the process of 'Alterity' at the most critical level where the tendency in the narrators of superiorising the Occidental discourses in mainstream praxis is prevalent, representing the hegemonic 'Self', and establishing Oriental discourses as the 'Other'. (Said 43). William Dalrymple's *In Xanadu* (1990) is no exception. Should a travelogue emphasise 'Alterity', or should it celebrate diversity as a unique identity? This was the central question with which this research began. The proposed paper aims to justify the hypothesis that William Dalrymple's *In Xanadu* is less a travelogue and more a commentary on the cultures which are 'non-Eurocentric', specifically the Islamic culture, and that a deliberate attempt has been made by the author himself to establish Eurocentrism as a canon. In the due course of the process of this attributing, the author does not realise the importance of the subtitle he added to the text: 'A Quest'. The process through which the Islamic and all other ethnicities are seen, aims to concentrate Islamophobia and Xenophobia in readers' minds and simultaneously dilutes the importance of the place 'Shang Du' [Xanadu] which Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw as the epitome of creative imagination. The paper also tries to lens through Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" from an Oriental discourse and tries to hypothesise Xanadu as the ultimate reality- the 'Sahasrara' of the 'Kundalini' which symbolises the higher spiritual consciousness, something that William Dalrymple is unable to internalise.

**Keywords:** Alterity, *Kundalini*, Islamophobia, Travelogue, Xenophobia

### Introduction

While defining the genre of 'Travel Writing', Carl Thompson in his *Travel Writing* (2011) remarks:

To travel is to make a journey, a movement through space. Possibly this journey is epic in scale, taking the traveller to the other side of the world or across a continent, or up a mountain; possibly, it is more modest in scope, and takes place within the limits of the traveller's own country or region, or even just their immediate locality. Either way, to begin any journey or, indeed, simply to set foot beyond one's own front door, is quickly to encounter difference and otherness. All journeys are in this way a confrontation with, or more



optimistically a negotiation of, what is sometimes termed alterity. Or, more precisely, since there are no foreign peoples with whom we do not share a common humanity, and probably no environment on the planet for which we do not have some sort of prior reference point, all travel requires us to negotiate a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity and identity, difference and similarity. (Thompson 09).

One can see that there are two prominent sections- first, where Thompson describes the nature of a travelogue, and in the latter, the essence of a travelogue. Scholars might not feel puzzled with the first section since it is a generalisation of the thematic discourse, whereas it is the second half that brings us to certain critical questions. Among them the first could be- is it necessary for a travelogue to create the binary of 'Self' and 'Other' through the process of 'Alterity'? Why would any author put his text to an edge where the cultural differences are emphasised rather than establishing the different ethnicities uniquely? What are the processes through which these binaries can be juxtaposed? These questions might not be raised for every travelogue but when it comes to William Dalrymple's *In Xanadu* (1990), these become crucial. *In Xanadu* is considered to be one of the well-written travelogues, perhaps, a much celebrated jewel for the crown of travel narratives. It traces back the journey which Marco Polo took from Jerusalem to Xanadu, the summer capital of the emperor Genghis Khan in the inner core of Mongolia, China. It is a journey through the different parts of the world that conjoin one of the oldest trading traffic- the silk route, and binds the political history of different nations. But, does this text emphasise 'Alterity'? If it does, what are the ways through which it has been emphasised? The proposed paper aims to justify the hypothesis that William Dalrymple's *In Xanadu* (1990) is less a travelogue and more a commentary on the cultures which are non-Eurocentric, a deliberate attempt made by the author himself to establish the Euro-culture as a standard one. In due course of the process of attributing, the author does not realise the importance of the subtitle that he added to the text: 'A Quest', because Shang Du [Xanadu] is a place that carries much historio-religio-cultural significance which is larger than Dalrymple's arguments that attack the different Oriental discourses.

### **Literature Review and Hypothesis**

While going through the available literature, it has been observed that there are not many scholars who have shown a great deal of interest in Dalrymple. The extent that we get is also not towards *In Xanadu*, but some other popular texts [specifically, *The Last Mughals* (1857)]. Despite the very fact that *In Xanadu* is a popular text, a prominent reason for not taking it into the consideration for research could be that the text wove too many objectionable and politically offensive discourses together which the scholars would find problematic to work on. Sana Nisar, a scholar from Islamabad, has tried to sketch a detailed picture of the journey in her paper entitled "Travel Writing; A critical study of William Dalrymple's *In Xanadu: a Quest*" (2016). She has delineated the journey and tried to juxtapose it with that of Marco Polo's. However, the attempt seems very general because Nisar did not discuss the ideas which are critical and crucial to identify the importance of different cultures. While talking about the importance of the place 'Shang Du', she writes: "Coleridge's description of Shangdu has shadows of the works of both Marco Polo and Samuel Purchas. Through Coleridge's portrayal of Shangdu, Xanadu became a metaphor for magnificence, lavishness, delight, glory and supremacy. Since then it is widely used in all literature to symbolise splendour, richness



and authority.” (Nisar 4). She tried to trace the history back to 1271 when Polo was only 17 years old and began his journey. In 1275, he finally reached the place, but unfortunately in 1396, the place was destroyed by the Ming dynasty under the rule of Zhu Yuan Zhang (Nisar 4).

Amoolyaratna and Suresh Kumar have tried to weave three narratives in a single thread in their work “A Study- the Travel Writing of William Dalrymple Include *In Xanadu: A Quest, City of Djinnns: A Year in Delhi, THE Age of Kali: Indian Travels & Encounters*” (2022), but the thread is very loose as far as the critical approaches to the texts are concerned. The interpretations are also not reliable since no textual references are there to validate the arguments. Trinanjana Roy, an independent scholar from West Bengal published a book review on her official blog despising the author. She did not approve of the text at all since she considered it to be a planned attack on the Asian countries on the grounds of ‘Racism, Islamophobia and Sexism’. She writes:

Before writing this review I repeatedly told myself not to get overly personal or emotional because reading this book was torture. I had several moments of throwing this book across the room or burning it down. And no I am not being dramatic... The book is filled with the callousness, arrogance, and ignorant mind of a whining privileged white child. He definitely showed no respect for any culture other than his own. While he wrote pages after pages about how refined the Byzantine empire was and how Ottomans were basically classless... The book stinks of Islamophobia. It's not that he is unaware of the religion but why not mock it and make fun of it when you can! His understanding was very limited to incorrect stereotypes and a disgusting attitude towards modesty and someone's faith. (Roy [www.trinanjana.com](http://www.trinanjana.com))

Roy's arguments are firmly rooted in an understanding where she does not approve of the authorisation in the name of religion. However, she did not justify her arguments properly in the article and touched the critical points vaguely.

Divyeshkumar D Bhatt, a scholar from Gujarat, India, defended his Ph. D. dissertation on Travel literature entitled “A Study of Travel Literature with Reference to Travel Writings of William Dalrymple” where he tried to analyse the texts written by William Dalrymple. The second chapter is devoted to *In Xanadu* where he presented a comparative study of Polo's journey with that of Dalrymple's. He writes:

The entire work [*In Xanadu*] revolves round his scheme of following the route of Marco Polo and thereby issuing his own reactions to the journey and observations of Polo, verifying the narrations and the details provided by this senior traveller and marking his own observations on to how the scenario has withstood the course of time and traits of development. (X).

However, the colonial interpretation of the text is entirely based on migration and diasporic tension. On the other hand, Rebecca Dorgelo presented a colonial and post-colonial interpretation of the text in her dissertation entitled “Travelling in history: the travel writing and narrative history of William Dalrymple”. According to her: “Dalrymple's popularity and engagement with colonial history and discourse, as well as the way his work spans multiple genres, make his texts particularly interesting examples of the ways in which popular non-fiction functions rhetorically in the public sphere.” (2).



We cannot agree with her because there are no overwhelming qualities so far as the delineations are concerned; rather, there is a tendency to represent his [Dalrymple's] culture as the 'Subject' which does not share equal standards with that of the Asian ethnic groups. Therefore, after consideration of the available literature, we could see two hypothetical gaps emerging from the dissection- Dalrymple's projection of the 'superior' culture is entirely Eurocentric and the Oriental discourses are treated through a lens of subaltern objectification. Secondly, in the due process of this constant alterity, the essence of the 'Quest' is lost. Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" (1816) has a universal appeal and philosophical dimension because there is a spiritual quest which can only be perceived through a reading where the readers are sensitive towards perceiving a higher consciousness. Dalrymple's attitude towards Xanadu loses its essence as he diverted his attention towards a diluted reading, and Xanadu becomes only an emblem of fortified ruin seen from a pair of materialistic eyes.

### **Analysis**

A two-fold analysis has been done here. In the first section, we can talk about how Dalrymple's portrayal of the journey is full of racist comments. His attempt to establish the high British culture as the sublime is evident in his narrative which ultimately questions too many ethnological aspects. The paper tries to focus mainly on three most important discourses. First, how Islamic community has been seen from a distance where the whole community is blamed time and again for institutionalised terrorism triggered by their religion. This is also a way of installing 'Islamophobia' into readers' minds, and therefore, perhaps, a deliberate attempt made by the author to juxtapose two different discourses that should not share any commonality- religion and terrorism. Secondly, how the cultures of the different non-European countries have been jeered at as they do not match with the European parameters which is a very common way of emphasising 'otherisation'. Finally, how the idea of 'Quest' has been seen from a Coleridgean perspective through a cross-sectional study of his poem "Kubla Khan" is also relevant. Dalrymple tried to establish a disconnection. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the narrative seems to be an attempt towards the defamation of the Islamic culture. This whole discourse directs us towards an understanding as to why we have to pay attention to the idea of 'Quest', and here a parallel discourse can be evoked to set it into the context. Xanadu is not a place to be discovered like 'Araby'. It is a higher consciousness to be acquired through the realisation of the great art and its sublimity. In fact, a careful reading suggests that the poem "Kubla Khan" where Coleridge mentioned the place, is chaotic, and at the same time, very spiritual. There is a transcendental aesthetics in the 'sunny pleasure dome' of Kubla Khan because the power behind the existence of the same [secondary imagination] transcendences it beyond material reality as Gyung-Ryul Jang mentions in his article entitled "The Imagination *Beyond* and *Within* the Language: An Understanding of Coleridge's Idea of Imagination" (1986):

'Repeated meditations' led Coleridge to suspect that, beyond the limits of this mechanical mode of memory, there must exist another "distinct and widely different" faculty of the mind which also occupies the middle place. In order to illuminate this unexplored faculty of the mind, i.e., the Imagination, he, in due course, presupposes the similar trichotomy [Fancy, Imagination, and Association] mentioned above... [t]hus it becomes pressing for Coleridge to give an immediate answer to the question of how the intermediate faculty possibly works.





Faced with that epistemological problem, Coleridge takes the road which is essentially transcendentalist. (506).

The same transcendental theology is also seen in the doctrines of '*Kundalini*' that we have in Tantric and Yogic studies since it refers to a space called '*Sahasrara*' which exists beyond the '*Shat-Chakra*' [The Six Points of '*Kundalini*']. Thus, it becomes axiomatic in many ways to juxtapose the transcendental theology of '*Kundalini*' with Kubla's palace. Kubla's '*pleasure dome*' is that sphere where the '*Kundalini*' sets the energy free from the bonds of material subsistence and proceeds towards the realisation of the divinity through the operation of secondary imagination that further illuminates it with transcendental aesthetics. This is the point of '*Quest*' – the knowledge of knowing the unknown- the sublime existence of being and non-being together. William Dalrymple deliberately failed to understand this because he considered the journey only as an external affair. In fact, in one of his interviews, he mentioned that he wanted to take it [the journey] up only because he would get a handsome scholarship. (Acknowledgements). His own comments disappoint readers in ways he can never imagine. He remarked that Marco Polo's journey was never a quest in that sense, and was a journey of a merchant who never cared about anything but economic pursuit: "Marco Polo's journey wasn't just a journey of religion. It was very clearly a journey by a merchant hoping to make a profit...My own book I wrote when I was still in university, and it was something I wrote to get someone to pay for my student travels." (Joshi 15).

Throughout the narrative, Dalrymple tries to establish his axiom that religion triggers institutionalised terrorism. We find Dalrymple writing: "This country [Turkey] has two problems. One is the mullah, the other is the army- both want to rule the country, and stop democracy." (78). The Army and the Mullahs, according to Dalrymple, are the representatives of the RSA (Repressive State Apparatuses) who have power-control. Terrorism as an institution has no place in religion, but making it a religion to rule the world is something we cannot agree to. Similarly, people from the Islamic communities have believed in many different ill-institutions like slavery and polygamy. Dalrymple's portrayal is questionable because it is as if all these institutions are Oriental discourses and the Western discourses have nothing to contribute to it. He tries to establish these cultural norms as the '*Other*' but does not believe the fact that similar instances are there in Occidental discourses. Slavery and child labour are the products of colonialism which we can trace back with American history and Afro-American narratives. Krishna Sen, a renowned scholar from West Bengal, observed in her chapter on "*African American Literature*" [in the jointly edited book *A Short History of American Literature* (2017)]: "The post-Reconstruction years saw the institution of slavery being replaced by the equally oppressive social stigma of racism throughout the nation, and efforts by Black leaders to combat it." (227). Therefore, Dalrymple's representation is not reliable in that sense as he has merely tried to attribute the blame to a civilization by suppressing the history of colonialism. Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) writes:

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. (Said 24).



Dalrymple creates this process of 'Otherisation' under the discourses of race, religion, language, and the superiority of British literature.

The establishment of 'Islamophobia' began when Dalrymple presented a conversation that he had with Krikor about Beirut in chapter 2. When Laura was suspicious about the 'Fireworks' and asked Krikor about it, he commented: "No, the restaurant is very safe. Beirut is a good town. Many nightclubs, many girls, and much dancing. There are some problems- bombs, kidnapping, gun fights, but nothing serious..." (54). He even said that he himself always carries a pistol for safety. But, the point is that there is no incident that has happened, nor is there any narrative that we get from Dalrymple which proves that such things happen in Beirut. So, the narrative that we get from Dalrymple is in reflexion. This narration has been taken into consideration because a few pages previously, Dalrymple mentions the same thing about the 'Hezbollah' community. He was of the opinion that they were 'religious' (31), but Laura claimed that "They're the most extreme terrorists in the entire Middle East, responsible for most of the recent kidnapping in Beirut." (31). These references also seem less justified because though Laura advised Dalrymple to read newspapers to look at the reports they contained, she neither mentioned any incident, nor any references from the newspaper itself. Travelogues are not reliable if they are not presented with pictures or proper entries. So, Dalrymple's narrative is in many ways questionable.

Secondly, Dalrymple was tremendously critical about 'Afghan' people, and the hatred that he has for them has no valid reason. In fact, he went to the extent of calling them 'piratical-looking'. In the beginning of chapter 5, when they were about to catch a bus in Afghanistan, Dalrymple writes: "Personally I wouldn't recommend it. Afghans are animals. I would wait until tomorrow. Quite apart from the smell, those barbarians are more than likely to rob you of everything you possess." (150). It is not clear why Dalrymple thinks of these people as barbarians. Is it for their long beard, their colour, their religion, or their culture? The instance of registering the pidgin wrongly is also something that the readers might find unethical on Dalrymple's end. On being asked about the identification of a 'Travel writer', Dalrymple replied, it is more like someone who drives the bus (151-152). This is not something we expected, because rather than telling them the real meaning of the unknown word, he simply jumped to the conclusion that Afghan people are illiterate and do not understand the lexical meanings of English words. Edward Said talks about a similar discourse in *Orientalism* (1978) and mentions it as a way of superior rising European society: "There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more sceptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter." (Said 24). Similarly, Dalrymple does not have any mouthful appetite for Mughal [Islamic] food and that is the reason why he found 'Kebabji' [a place that is famous for Kebabs in Iran] as 'filthy' (139). This is not only differentiating and establishing the European food habits and cuisine as a standard, but despising the non-European discourses as 'non-standard'. He even saw Mongols as 'ugly' and condemned them for their complexion. Dalrymple writes: "The Mongols were ugly and inquisitive. They had narrow, high-set eyes and tight, dark skin." What makes the narrator think that these features mentioned in the quote make a person ugly is still under speculation. As a travel writer, Dalrymple is more occupied in creating the binary. One can ponder over these explicit comments but what is more important is the outlook with which



European society looks at non-Europeans. The process of 'alterity' and presenting the oriental discourse as 'Other' resulted out of the sheer hatred for the countries that lack centrality.

Let us now consider the second part of the argument. Dalrymple conferred the subtitle 'A Quest' to the text, and here we cannot but speculate what ideas of 'Quest' he has been forming in his theology. To answer this question, we must look at the very end of the travelogue where Dalrymple has finally reached Xanadu only to discover the ruins of history. He even compared the condition of the ruins with the heath scene of *King Lear* (Dalrymple 298). The enigma with which he began his journey to Xanadu seems to be lost, and now the destination feels like a boy's whimsical journey to a fair. After reaching the place, Louisa and Dalrymple recited Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" to which one of the policemen remarked "English people, very, very bonkers." (300). The speculation we will have to take into consideration here as to why it becomes necessary for them to recite this poem. From the beginning till the end, Dalrymple was concerned about Marco Polo's journey and not Coleridge's, so what made them think that it was apt to recite the poem? Is it also an attempt to establish high British poetry as a canon before the Chinese policemen? It is better that we pause the discussion here and look at Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" from a different context.

The intensity of Coleridge's poems is such that G. Wilson Knight in his *The Starlit Dome* (1941) remarked that Coleridge, with his one complete and two incomplete poems, could match with Dante and Shakespeare: "I SHALL concentrate first on *Christabel*, *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*. Within a narrow range these show an intensity comparable with that of Dante and Shakespeare." (Knight 83). "Kubla Khan" is always seen from a discourse of creative imagination where the faculty of the artist has been emphasised. There are multiple ways through which the text can be seen, and its multiple interpretations have made it a complex labyrinth. G. Wilson Knight states: "I next translate the domed symbolism of *Kubla Khan* into such shadow-terms corresponding to the original in somewhat the same way as the science of Christian theology corresponds, or should correspond, to the *New Testament*." (91). What makes the poem complex and almost impregnable is its rich and multi-layered symbolism and the power of hypnotism to which the readers seem baffled. Though, Hilde Scheuer Bliss and Donal Thayer Bliss are of the opinion that "Kubla Khan" 'lacks high spiritual beauty' which "The Ancient Mariner" bears: "It remained a mystery to me why it should be so highly praised, for I recognized in it nothing more than a rather grotesque fantasy of a type not unsuited to an addict's pen, but quite lacking in that high spiritual beauty which so informs and perfuses *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*." (261). Though, this is not entirely true.

After a deeper probing into "Kubla Khan", there is no confusion to understand that there is a 'Quest' that Coleridge would like to emphasise on. But this quest is not something which Dalrymple or Marco Polo has emphasised. This is a quest which a soul undertakes to achieve higher consciousness that can never be achieved by someone who lacks spiritual understanding. The quest is within, and here the whole journey becomes a part of something which can be understood from a perspective of higher spirituality that we see in Occult, Tantric, Yogic, and Buddhist studies- 'The *Kundalini*'. Crism, an independent Tantric scholar, is of the opinion that [secondary] imagination is the first step through which we can attain higher spiritual wisdom of *Kundalini*. He mentions about the same in his article entitled "Imagination: from a *Kundalini* Perspective" (2015):



We can fantasise and daydream, but we can also create and we can also open areas beyond the fantasies and beyond the creating into venues that allow us access to remote viewing and experiencing visions, etc. Imagination is the first step into visualisation, which has a better reputation. I suggest that as *Kundalini* people we can cultivate the imagination and release the doubts that we have been programmed with regarding its use... It is necessary to use this faculty for the discernment of the metaphysical. (www.edgemagazine.net).

By 'imagination', Crism did not mean the primary one because primary imagination is based on 'perception' (Coleridge 488). Whereas the secondary imagination holds the power of 'creation', and *Kundalini* has always been the source of all creative energy. This justifies as to why we can compare Coleridge's journey in "Kubla Khan" to the astral realm of *Kundalini*. Many scholars have talked about '*Kundalini*' in their articles by providing suitable references from the Hindu and Tantric Scriptures. To brief it simply, *Kundalini* is a hierarchical astral structure that resides within the human body conjoining the coccyx and the human brain. It contains six *chakras* [power centres, each containing lotuses different in colours and petal numbers] which are located at different places of the human body. Professor Madhu Khanna, an eminent Tantric scholar from Oxford, is of the opinion that:

The Shakti principle of the cosmos in the subtle body is known as Devi *Kundalini* or the Coiled One conceived of as an infinite reservoir of power (Shakti). In her unmanifest, latent state *Kundalini* is visualised as a sleeping serpent. It lies coiled in three-and-a-half circles around the central axis at the base of the spine, in *Muladhara* the 'root support' chakra, located between the anus and the genitals. Resting, *Kundalini* Shakti is subtle as a fine fibre of lotus-stalk and bright as a lightning-flash. The microcosm is something akin to an electric battery in which this cosmic power latently lies. When this power is not orderly channelled, it either withers away or has limited expression. In a generic sense *Kundalini* is the energy that lies at the root of all creation. It is the origin of all powers, all strengths and all forms of life that this universe may assume. (228-229).

'*Kundalini*' is the source of power in the human system. It contains the six *chakras* which help us to differentiate between our physical and astral body, and they are- *Muladhara* [The root *chakra*, situated at the base of spine], *Swadhisthana* [in the area of the genitals], *Manipura* [at the navel], *Anahata* [at the heart], *Vishuddha* [at the throat], and *Ajna* [between the eyebrows, considered to be "the third eye"]. After crossing these six astral knots, the soul reaches a space that is beyond any existence and contains the divine knowledge of higher consciousness- the *Sahasrara* [The Crown]. These astral chakras are weaved through spiritual knots by the three principal 'nadis' [considered as the sacred rivers]- *Ida*, *Pingala* and *Susumna*. Now, let us read the lines from "Kubla Khan":

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.





So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round;  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery...

Many readers [including Dalrymple] think that Xanadu is a place that Marco Polo tried to reach in order to establish the point that Christianity prevails over every other religion. But that is not true. Polo's *The Travels* (1613) contains only two chapters which are dedicated towards the places of Kublai Khan. The centre of the narrative is not 'Shangtu' [Xanadu] but the heroic adventures and achievements of the emperor Kublai Khan. It is the palace only that Polo has described in his narrative:

DEPARTING from the city last mentioned, and proceeding three days' journey in a north-easterly direction, you arrive at a city called Shandu [Shangtu], built by the Great Khan Kublai, now reigning. In this he caused a palace to be erected, of marble and other handsome stones, admirable as well for the elegance of its design as for the skill displayed in its execution. (70).

Polo mentions the name in his narrative only seven times and he never adds any importance so far as cultural history or religio-philosophical importance is concerned. We have to remember that Purchas' reading was not a cultural reading. It was purely a spiritual one. It was *Purchas, His Pilgrimage* (1613) which Coleridge was reading before he fell asleep. Therefore, Xanadu is not an external place, but an inner consciousness that is triggered by 'secondary imagination'. Xanadu, therefore, is the 'Kundalini' and the 'A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice' is the crown, white in colour that represents the divine consciousness- *The Sahasrara*. We can find the reference in Robert E. Svoboda: "The *Sahasrara*, the 'Thousand-Petaled Lotus' is at the top of the head. Although it is a lotus, it is not a Chakra because there is no plexus of *nadis* there; there is only one *nadi* [The *Susumna*], which connects the *Sahasrara* with the *Ajna*..." (*Aghora II* 64). Alph, the 'sacred' river 'meandering' is the prime serpent- The *Susumna*; 'the ancient forest' is the *Dwadasha Chakra*- the abode of the 'Shakti' [the Power]; 'The woman wailing' and a 'Damsel' are the Shakti herself symbolising the 'Chaitanya' who is dancing with a Dulcimer that represents divine knowledge. Coleridge tried to look within this spiritual structure and could not recollect it after the interruption. To recollect is to experience that divine consciousness within and that is a 'Quest'. G. Wilson Knight argues that the river Alph is a symbol of life. He states that: "The river is 'sacred'. Clearly a sacred river which runs through nature towards death will in some sense correspond to life. I take the river to be, as so often in Wordsworth, a symbol of life." (91). So, the quest is within that creates, and therefore, symbolises the blooming life-force.

A quest that Marco Polo and William Dalrymple have failed to realise is that there are seven places that conjoin this journey into a single thread- Jerusalem, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan [with India], and China. A cultural reading will obviously inform us about the diverse ethnic discourses. But, a religious reading of the text would help us to locate the seven places which are not



only spiritually [representing the higher sublimity], but culturally important. While delineating, Dalrymple subconsciously mentioned seven important cultural and religious places that form the lotuses- The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, The Ummayad Mosque in Syria, The Gok Medrese in Turkey, Dogubayazit in the border of Iran, Shrine of Ali in Afghanistan, Ig-Gah mosque in China, and Finally Xanadu. These are not religious places in that sense, but represent the higher consciousness that any art form attempts to venture. All these structures are large and rich in aesthetics that enable us to realise the sublimity behind any art. This is achieved through a creative process, and ultimately leads us to the realisation of the sublime. Dalrymple was trying to set a comparison between Islamic and European architecture, but he did not realise that he was tangling a consciousness through these places that creates a counter discourse for the narrative hypothesising that the divine consciousness is there, irrespective of the fact which religion one belongs to. One can believe in nothing and yet can have a higher consciousness. The way this consciousness is achieved is the 'Quest', and it is never external.

### **Conclusion**

Let us go back now to the first question with which we began this paper- is it necessary to create 'alterity' in a travelogue? The answer to this question is an obvious 'no'. The only way to respect any culture is to accept the fact that the culture is unique and, therefore, there should not be any place for comparison. Said in his *Orientalism* (1978) observed that: "...uniqueness is not only in its size, or even in the intelligence of its contributors, but in its attitude to its subject matter, and it is this attitude that makes it of great interest for the study of modern Orientalist projects." (85). The way Dalrymple's narrative sets its flow makes it clear from the beginning that a twenty-one year old boy with a 'prejudiced Anglocentric undergraduate' (Dalrymple Acknowledgements) will obviously set a discourse where Eurocentric culture has been prioritised. The idea of 'Quest', therefore, mediaeval or modern, is lost because Dalrymple's intention was not to create a travel narrative. His primary purpose was to glance through these cultures from a Euro-hegemonic angle and never to appreciate the diversity. So, from the beginning it was not the silk-route, it was the route of the Oriental world he ventured and tried to establish xenophobia. "Kubla Khan" talks about a journey; a 'Quest' and not the destination itself. It is because the 'Sunny pleasure dome' exists only in the higher consciousness and to witness that, human souls have to travel a long way through rigorous practice of the faculty. Even after reaching that space, one might feel baffled and there is no parity between the realisations of the sublime by two souls because it might vary depending on the creative faculty and consciousness. The poem is not incomplete in that sense, because it is the unfledged existence that attributes a unity to the poem. Therefore, the subtitle that Dalrymple added to the text is not justified as he himself fails to realise the same. He produced a narrative containing more than three hundred pages only to discover the fact that he was granted a scholarship, and never acknowledged the fact that there is actually a 'Quest' that a writer has to take every single time whenever s/he tries to produce a piece of art. The journey towards this experience is the 'Quest' and that is the higher reality.



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