



## Shrinking Circumferences of State: Documentation of Anarchy in North–West Pakistan in William Dalrymple’s

### *The Age of Kali*

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### **Abstract**

State and Community are the two social institutions which operate within each other’s territories. The basic evolving concepts behind the both are to impart the orderliness in human life. These Institutes function to ascertain that any member of civilization finds the way to procure his/her individual stake and granted access to all the resources available and accorded to his/her merits. In ideological social order, the Institution of Community functions within the jurisdiction of the Stately Agencies. The individual, especially where the Stately agencies weaken and Community rules supreme, gets grinded in double fold. The individual finds the life a very challenging task as in the absence of effective Stately agencies; there remain meager scopes of economic assurances resulting in grinding poverty, lawlessness, illegal trades and trafficking and supremacy of injustice. In combating life in the conditions of the community sovereignty, the basic Human Rights of the individuals are violated for reasons not for nothing.

In literature and literary criticism, the issues of the treatment, status and dignified ways through which human self is to be treated not just in the theories but in the practical life have been in the centre spot of discussions which often are labelled (in one of the multiple connotations of the term) as the Humanism, humanist or anti-humanist approaches. Despite the bulks of influencing agencies to the human organizations such as religious and ethical schools, the academic and scholastic trainings, the entertaining fine arts which also try to colour the sentiments even of the average human mind in society --- there are rounds of human degradation, alienation, oppression, abductions, and atrocities in the world in the third millennium of the

civilization. The world faces all the threats of war, nuclear weapons and terrorism in one or another form, all these extremist agencies staunchly defy the human value and humanistic optimisms. This paper examines the reflections of William Dalrymple's travels in the Pakistan, especially in the North-East borders where anarchy rules supreme and human life staggers under the obligations of local feudal forces and tries to locate the role of stately agencies for such plights of human degradations. Human civilization has developed several institutions to impart order in the social corridors of life, and divide responsibilities to protect the orderliness implemented through the agencies of the institutions. The Institutes function to ascertain that any member of civilization finds the way to procure his/her individual stake and granted access to all the resources available and accorded to his/her merits. On these measures, the institution that functions on the written manifesto and describes legal obligation on the every individual is the agency of the State. The State vests power in every individual to pursue a safe and secured life and controls and commands several duties at the same time; in this way the State might implement constraints if any individual fails to abide by the basic norms of conducts.

Community is another social institute which operates within the territories of the State but has its own distinctive norms for the member individuals. Where the State has its written constitution and legislative powers to implement and enforce its norms, the Community functions with help of pride, honours and status within the community. The community has its own norms and punitive measures to deal with every breach. The leaders, mostly those who top the power grid, of the community go to any extent to punish and penalize the member individual as there are no written norms and in some cases the measures get informal validation as being the community norms in the Stately legislation and thus remain unchallengeable.

In ideological social order, the Institution of Community functions within the jurisdiction of the Stately Agencies. The individual, especially where the Stately agencies weaken and Community rules supreme, gets grinded in double fold. The individual finds the life a very challenging task as in the absence of effective Stately agencies; there remain meager scopes of economic assurances resulting in grinding poverty, lawlessness, illegal trades and trafficking and supremacy of injustice. In combating life in the conditions of the community sovereignty, the basic Human Rights of the individuals are violated for reasons not for nothing. It is seen and observed that in such states of political and legal anarchy the communities intersecting each others' territories rise in the form of feudal groups. Sometimes even certain families within singular community engage in combats and clashes. And it is natural in the absence of legal bounding and powerless political institutions, these clashes often take the forms of bloodshot violent mechanism.

In literature and literary criticism, the issues of the treatment, status and dignified ways through which human self is to be treated not just in the theories but in the practical life have been in the centre spot of discussions which often are labelled (in one of the multiple connotations of the term) as the Humanism, humanist or anti-humanist approaches. The classical critic Aristotle holding the civic humanist thought states “It is our affections for others that cause us to choose to live together.” (Aristotle) The similar concern for the state of human beings and concern for the quality of life is put forward by Sir Philip Sydney when he professes that “Well-knowing’ remains of any value only if it results in “Well-doing.” (Sydney 29) The concerns altogether lead to the assertion and understanding a code that acknowledges the significance of standard values in the social life. Mathew Arnold advocates poetry to be the “Criticism of life”, here in this dictum too; a concern for the qualitative measures for life, human co-existence finds assertion. Karl Marx presents the same emphasis when he says: “Communism is the positive suppression of private property as human self estrangement, and hence.

The true appropriation of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a social, i.e. human, being... This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be solution. (Marx)

E. M. Foster holds the views, often termed as Liberal Humanism, of small-scale, individualist treatment of the man. In his idealism Foster hopes and tries to lay foundations of bridge of friendship even where the contempt and suspicion dominates the minds. In the ending of his *Passage to India*, after the troubled trial of sexual assault to the English lady, doctor Aziz engulfed in great contempt for the British is approached by liberal minded Fielding who asks the doctor over a ride “Why can’t we be friends now? (Foster) Here lies the touchstone of Fosterian liberal humanism. The German novelist Thomas Mann too tries to separate the concepts of humanity from the clutches of political power games.

It has never seemed possible to me that anyone could disagree that ‘humanity’, a human way of thinking and observing, obviously signifies the opposites of all politics. To think and to reflect in a human way means to think and to reflect in a nonpolitical way. (Mann)

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William's travels in the land of Pakistan in *The Age of Kali* present William's detailed study of violence stricken environment of Pakistan and put on the surface the weakening traits of peaceful public life. The essay "On the Frontier" presents the account of William's travels on the North-East border on the Indian side, the region located on the foot and valleys of Himalayan mountain Range and showcases the wild play of weaponry and drug trafficking.

*On the frontier* is the essay narrating William Dalrymple's exploration of the North-West frontier of Pakistan. At the very outset, William makes it clear as he experiences over there that though the area might technically be the part of Pakistani territories; it has nothing to do with the Pakistani Government. The country's Administrative or Legal powers retained no effectiveness, but rather the area was dominated by the Tribal groups which operated their reigns among the people with their unique tribal conventional laws, rules and regulations. The prosperity of the area, Dalrymple notes, makes its way through the drug trafficking. Dalrymple is simply shocked to witness the treads and commercial activities revolve round the operations of weapon trade, drug trafficking and violent play of them in the routine life.

**Violence is to the North-West Frontier what religion to Vatican.** It is a raison d'être, a way of life, an obsession a philosophy. Bandoliers hang over the people's shoulders; grenades are tucked into their pockets. Status symbols here are not Mercedes or Servile Row suits; in Peshawar you know you have arrived when you can drive to work in a captured Russian T-72 Tank. (Emphasis mine) (Dalrymple 313)

The easy availability and access to the weapons glimpses, at the very outset, the wild play of savage life of the region. It speaks of the sheer failure of the state agencies to make it sure for the safe life prospect for the ordinary persons. The geographical and territorial adversities could be held as to impart strength to the local community to overpower the state agencies and to exercise their own feudal systems in the region. William observes:

The pathological frame of mind of the frontier people is partly derived from the harshness of the landscape. It is hard, barren, dry country, drained of colour, warmth and softness. The mountains are grey and sheer, covered with sharp mica schist. (Dalrymple 313)

The same indifference and aloofness of the locals arrests William's attention again and again, and somehow the grayness of the landscape makes him couple this quality of the locals to the geographical conditions. He further comments:

The people here are as cold as the schist. Black, stony faces with long, drawn features look out from blank forests of facial hair. The sub-zero temperature makes them withdraw into themselves, both mentally and physically. They lift up their knees to their chins and wrap their heavy Kashmiri shawls around both. On top, their heads are covered with woolen roll mop caps. You see only Dark eyes peering out into the cold. Eighty per cent are illiterate. Yet they are proud. They sneer through their moustaches, eyes leveled straight, in contempt as much as in curiosity. (Dalrymple 313)

Another reason of the arrogance in the locals of this region, i.e. the Pathan as they are known as, William dissects into the historical facts and finds out that these are the people who have never been conquered by external authorities, not even by the British. And their rejection of any other legal or legislative authority other than their own Rule is validated by the observer like Dalrymple too, when he states: "Although most Pathans are technically within Pakistan, the writ of Pakistan law does not carry into the heartland of their territories." (Dalrymple 314)

The entire area exhibit a full play of human existence which might flourish in the territories without the stately agencies and institutions which not even vainly try to impose and enforce their power. William asserts that the condition of the region was the same from the primitive time. Even the British, (the Reformers!!) preferred to be away from it, and what the Pakistan Government is doing is just following the presidents of the British rule.

Beyond the checkpoints on the edge of Peshawar, tribal law--- based on the Institutions of tribal council and the blood feud --- rules unchallenged and unchanged since its origins long before the birth of Christ. (Dalrymple 314)

Dalrymple also notes the fact that the violence and profusion of weapons in the private hands that there is no guarantee to safety and that is why he makes it clear:

The tribal areas are officially closed to all foreigners, as their safety cannot be guaranteed by the Pakistan government: kidnapping and murder are so frequent here that they are virtually cottage industries. **To visit you have to**

**smuggle yourself quietly across the tribal border, ideally in the company of some tribal older.** (Dalrymple 314) [Emphasis mine]

Having arrived into the market place of Darra Adam Khel, a place just over the border in Tribal territory, Dalrymple is astonished to witness a free-sale market of the deadly weapons; his shocking surprise nicely gets translated into the pictorial description he makes of the landscape:

...lines of high-explosive warheads sit in glass cupboards facing on to the streets as innocently as jars of humbugs in an English village store. The stacked mortar shells and the anti-tank ammunition are available over the counter, for cash, as if they were tins of Heinz backed beans. Nearby the belts of machine-gun bullets are hung up like strings of onions. Outside, left lying around the streets like so much discarded gardening equipment can be found heavy machine-guns. (Dalrymple 314)

Dalrymple also collects information about the prospective buyers of these weapons. He is informed even the lower middle-class person would equip himself with two-to-four medium sized artilleries and one-or two big ones. He was also said that the Afghan war was also secured good business for the traders of the weapons, and that now it being over the local tribesmen did the purchase in order to meet their **regular** needs. The information given in the ordinary conversation which states the middleclass fellows too need to keep weapons for “Regular” needs. This is enough to have an idea about the lawlessness and prevalent anarchy; the total absence of State.

Besides the astonishing trades of the weapons, another lucrative source of revenue for the local people was the illicit trade of drug. Dalrymple goes to the visit of such center of opium trade, Landi Khotal, though it was no free from risk of losing life. He describes the availability of the variety of narcotics in this area just as day today use commodities in other parts of world:

“Landi Khotal was awash with narcotics. Heroin itself was generally kept out of sight under the counter, but hashish and opium were freely available and as casually displayed as cigarettes and betel nut. Some of the hash was set in great toffee-like blocks; other pieces were folded into hash chapattis or tortured into spaghetti strands. One roadside stall moulded its hash into curvilinear arrangements that looked like liquorices allsorts. (Dalrymple 322)

In the talks with one of the locals Dalrymple finds the results of the rehabilitation of the illicit trade of the narcotics, as the local person told him that the wells built with the US funding at the promise of leaving this trade and replacing the crops, are now

used to produce better quality opium. The aids of rehabilitations and the international funds were used exactly in the opposite to the purposes with which they were funded.

Another trade of the place is the smuggled goods market which might be ranked among the biggest ones in Asia. Here the smuggled goods from all the Asian countries are easily available. The border territories allow the locals to smuggle the goods from the neighboring nations and as the goods come without any legal-commercial framework, it sells cheaper attracting the customers and promoting the seller. But ultimately the practice leads to damage the state economy, and give rise to chain of other illicit activities.

The violent play of the feudal forces is personally witnessed by William. He narrates in detail how one of the family members was murdered in his presence and how the death was taken as the point of taking revenge. At the home of Hajji Firoz din- Khel, whose brother was murdered by the opposite group, many people had gathered for the funeral, to one William asks:

‘What will happen now?’

There will be a truce for funeral’, said the man and then Hajji will be required to recover his honour.’

‘What does that mean? I asked.

‘It means,’ said the man, ‘that he must seek revenge.’ (Dalrymple 336)

The socio-political infrastructures of nations not only provide a suitable legal framework for large scale operation of markets, but also extend the scope of solidarity beyond each individual’s immediate circle of family and acquaintance, making it possible to fund and administer the formal social and personal way of life that is in terms with his own safety and the safety of his fellow beings. Looking to the observations made by William Dalrymple about North West Pakistan, the state seems at the minimal role and under such circumstances the community and its norms have acquired prominence and the machinery of control has become limited to the elite groups who are not accountable to the mass of population and the life of an individual takes president of such ideologies and in this way led astray and as seen in the case of Hajji aspires to retain honour through the way that leads to damage the social accountability.

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