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William Dalrymple's Nine Lives - In Search of Sacred in Modern India: A Semiotic Analysis of Culture and Language

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ABSTRACT

The expression of culture through language. In most instances, it serves as the foundation for ethnic, regional, national, or even global identity. Like the two sides of a single sheet of paper, language and culture are entangled. Both of them are perceptive and capable of adjusting to changing conditions. Language fully expresses people's values and norms, and as values and norms are inherently changeable, language must adapt to cultural changes. A complicated and analogous relationship exists between language and culture. Language defines, transmits, and sustains culture, which is a creation of the human mind. Without a doubt, there is a symbiotic relationship between language and culture. Through a Semiotic Analysis of "Nine Lives: In Search of the Lost" this paper aims to explore Language and Culture.

In this essay, William Dalrymple's "Nine Lives: In Search of Sacred in Modern India" will be used as a case study to examine language and culture through semiotic analysis. By British journalist William Dalrymple, this work is a travelogue that combines anthropological investigation with introspective thought. To choose nine Indians whose lives had been strongly influenced by faith, Dalrymple travelled the nation. With profound insight, he records these lives. India's religious diversity is examined in this nonfiction piece. Language in this novel can be used to identify each character's cultural identity. After fighting against the Chinese invasion of Tibet, a Buddhist monk dedicates the remainder of his life to hand-printing the greatest prayer flags as a kind of restitution to India. As she witnesses her best friend ritually starve herself to death, a Jain nun exercises her capacity for detachment. Nine people, nine lives—each following a different religious path and telling a fascinating tale that reflects the Indian subcontinent's rich cultural diversity.

Language functions as a system of "representation." Language serves as a symbol for common cultural meanings. It accomplishes this through both spoken and written words, as well as any other means of representing and comprehending meaning. It can be portrayed through objects,

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body language, music, body movements, gestures, and arbitrary symbols. A group's culture is how its members communicate their shared understandings of they live in. People in various communities have distinct perspectives on how the world works. As a result, they create various common meanings and various civilizations. Thus, language serves as a representation of how other civilizations understand certain concepts. Languages vary in how they convey cultural differences. In his essay *Representation and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall defines culture and explores how it interacts with language and society.

Meaning is constantly created anytime people engage with one another. Language also includes nonverbal communication systems like body language and music that may be decoded by a culture's members. All of these languages function through representation, in which an action, a symbol, or a sound stands in for a common intended and, to some extent, perceivable meaning. Additionally, language can be viewed as a indicating practise Languages include meaning in the form of comprehensible symbols or signs.

A Buddhist monk, a Jain nun, a Keralan Theyyam artist, and nine other Indians are featured in William Dalrymple's book *Nine Lives: In Search of Sacred in Modern India*. Yellamma's devadasi, a prominent Rajasthani mediaeval poetess, a Sufi believer, a devadasi who dedicated her life to the goddess, He encountered three people while travelling through India: an idol maker, a woman who practised tantric ritual, and a travelling minstrel known as a Baul. Travel writing is a type of creative nonfiction in which the main theme is the experiences the narrator has while visiting other countries. It is also known as travel writing. The three main categories of travel writing are as follows. The original of travel writing is the straightforward, direct "travel guide," written with the intention of helping travellers in real life. The journey is recounted in a chronological order, with precise times, locations, settings, and experiences being faithfully related. As long as the reader doesn't anticipate any major insights from these works, they can be helpful. Here, utilitarianism is the guiding principle rather than wisdom. "Historo-geographical" tour books are the second category of trip literature. This kind of book is uncommon in contemporary writing. Classical and Renaissance works contain it more frequently. Personal discovery accounts make up the third category of travel books. In the process of travelling or visiting a specific location, the author makes insightful insights about himself or his surroundings.

Here, exploring deeper psychological or moral topics is more important than simply imparting knowledge about the locations visited. This genre of travel writing is relatively new in the literature of the world.

Nine diverse persons, each of whom represents a different religious path, are profiled in the book's nine chapters.

In spite of all its complexities and modernity, India nonetheless retains a sacred culture, as this book demonstrates.

The spiritually inclined individuals Dalrymple encounters on his journey across the subcontinent are headed toward salvation.

Dalrymple encounters instances of widespread religiosity as well as the tenacious adherence to values and ritualistic behaviours in the face of rapid change.

In search of the final traces of mysterious India, Dalrymple travels the length and width of the nation. This book explores the lives of nine people who reside in the most remote areas of religious ecstasy. It investigates many cults and sects, their customs, and rituals.

Them also gives each of the stories a fictional element that makes it more intriguing.

The book *Nine Lives* is about mysticism, transcendental religion, and common individuals who find themselves in remarkable situations. Perhaps the idea of renunciation and the pursuit of the ultimate truth is felt most strongly in the present, when senseless worldly pursuits are taking place against the backdrop of terrorist attacks and other natural disasters. In this book, the author purposefully stays out of the spotlight, letting his characters tell their own tales. The nine tales alternated between worldly affliction and devotion to religion. This essay seeks to analyse *Nine Lives* from a semiotic perspective.

Nun Prasannamati Mataji practises Jainism.

whoever Dalrymple encounters along the way. This character's use of language and vocabulary, as well as its interpretation, reflects the culture of Jains. Sallekhana, which meaning ritual fast till death, Its significance goes beyond that for Mataji. It was the pinnacle of her existence as an ascetic, in her eyes. It is what she pursued as the most effective path to release. She sees it as a victory against death and a sign of hope. Sallekhana is a difficult process for the majority of individuals, however for Mataji, it is painless. In order to focus on the soul and on eradicating all negative karma, which will lead to the Ultimate Reality, the body cools down. The term "sallekhana" is almost as fascinating to Jain as going to a new surroundings, brimming with opportunities. The Jains' interpretation of the word "Sallekhana" itself refers to their cultural religion. To conquer is to get through the use of force or to prevail in battle. Mahavira, who revitalised Jainism, was known as the "conqueror" or "jina" in Jain. He did not conquer any nations in this instance; instead, he defeated himself. He was the great hero of the inner life

rather than the conflicts of the outside world. He elevated himself to the stature of a man who had gained divine status via a constant process of austerity, discipline, self-purification, and knowledge. The term "spiritual wisdom" has various symbolic connotations for Prasannamati Mataji. Spiritual wisdom is similar to the ghee in milk in that you can't see it at first, therefore you have to have faith that it is there. Just if you can only fully utilise the potential of milk if you master the right procedures, which include how to divide milk into curds and how to heat butter to create ghee. Even when it is obscured by clouds, the sun is always present. Similar to this, the soul is attempting to grasp for emancipation despite being constrained by sin, desire, and attachments. You can clear the haze and discover how to separate the milk's ghee by adhering to the Jain path.

The six blind men and the elephant parable is used by the Jains. It is a winnowing fan, one person grabs the ears and declares. Another person encircles it and calls it a pillar. But they all just offer us one partial representation of the whole truth. The elements shouldn't be seen as competing with one another. As the many hues of the spectrum, they are related to one another. In the same way that the signifier and its signifieds are alternate readings of reality, so are they.

Taashi Pasang is another figure. An Indian Buddhist monk spends the rest of his life hand-printing the best prayer flags in order to atone for the bloodshed he committed while fighting the Chinese conquest of Tibet. Flags can be studied as parts of a primarily symbolical system of signals in semiotics, where a code systematically connects a signifier and signified. In symbols, the relationship between signifier and signified is completely arbitrary and needs to be taught via cultural norms. Each letter's form and it has no actual connection to the sound it conveys. A symbol and what it stands for don't make sense together. The relationship must be understood, and over time it usually comes to be linked with the idea it stands for. Flags are emblems that stand in for many nations or organisations. It is necessary to learn what is being communicated. The prayer flags served as a symbol of power, wisdom, compassion, and serenity for Taashi Pasang. According to Tibetan culture, the wind will carry the prayers and mantras on these flags, spreading kindness and compassion across the universe. Therefore, it is believed that the prayer flags will assist everyone.

The highest reality, according to the Buddha, can only be realised within and cannot be expressed in words. The culture is not verbally portrayed here, but rather using meditation-related terms. The Buddha made the decision to reject the world and dedicate himself to a life of religion. The popular image of Buddha is that of a sage in deep meditation who is engrossed in the bliss of it. The term "Self actualization" refers to a detachment from worldly pleasures in Buddhist culture. They contend that the mind is what ultimately causes misery. The road to

enlightenment is a non-attached mind.

Haridas, a theyyam artist from Kerala, is another figure. There is more to the word "Theyyam" than just a dancing style. For the people of Kerala, it serves as a representation of benevolence, wealth, as well as a means of warding off illness, poverty, and evil spirits. Each Theyyam depicts a different mythological, heavenly, ancestral, animal, snake, or heroic figure, each with its own unique shape form.

the origin narrative, etc. Each theyyam is uniquely and painstakingly constructed in accordance with the persona being presented, including the headdress, face painting, breast plate, bracelets, garlands, and cloth attire. The Theyyam is revered and seen by many as God. The Living God's main feature is that its followers can communicate with it. People believe that their voice is God's voice. "Uriyadu Kelppikkal" is the name of Theyyakkolam's voice. People tell the Living God about their concerns and issues while offering "Vazhipad"—money and other divine things. For their alleviation, the Theyyakkolam will provide some sort of powder as "Prasadam" ('Kuri'). Theyyakkolams were used to solve even the most serious issues that plagued society. According to certain theories, some Kolams were even eliminated terrible endemic illnesses among the population. They immediately go to the patient's home and hurl "Kuri Prasadam" at them in an effort to alleviate their suffering. Three months out of every year, Haridas performs Theyyam. During those months, He becomes into God. Despite being a dalit, he is revered by even the most hateful Namboodiri brahmins. The ceremonial form can also be seen as a tool for resistance and retaliation against caste abuses. However, the theyyam season is the only time they are revered and venerated. These individuals return to their menial manual work for the remainder of the year after it is finished. This chapter is highlighted by rich historical, folkloric, and mythological incidents by Dalrymple. As is the case with each and every story in the "theyyam" form was developed as a response to Kerala's oppressive and rigid cast system, which is discussed in the book where the social backdrop plays a significant influence in the construction of a faith. Numerous theyyam stories make fun of the Brahmins and Nayyars and criticise how they treat one another. The theyyam performers assert that their performances have significantly altered how people view lower castes.

Another character, Kanai Das Baul, holds that God can be found right now, in the body of a person who is seeking the truth, not in a stone or bronze idol or in the heavens.

One only needs to give up their stuff and commit to living the life of the road, locate a guru, and follow the loving path. Finding the holy Inner Knowledge is their aim. These singing philosophers use man as their ultimate barometer. The songs Kanai Das Baul sings have a

variety of themes, including passion, devotion, ecstasy, and life's madness. In their language and culture, the word "body" refers to more than just a human body. Body is the real mosque, real church, and real temple in their eyes. Everybody's bodies contain everything in the universe; everything outside of the body is outside the universe. The term "song" has a wider meaning for Kanai than merely music. For him, the song he was singing was about God. He merely desired to learn what was contained in his song and how to decode its concealed meanings.

Another person Dalrymple encounters on his journey is Rani bai, a devadasi from Karnataka. The majority of devadasis now exclusively operate in the sex industry. But the idea of a woman entering the lifelong service of the deity or goddess is the true meaning. Dasi refers to a female servant, and Deva refers to God.

These teenage temple ladies are depicted in ninth-century poetry, and the language of those lyrics reveals the culture of the time. These poems have been interpreted as metaphors for the seeker's and devotee's hunger for God.

Another figure who represents Tantric tradition is Manisha ma Bhairavi.

Tantra mostly consists of rituals and mantras designed to have particular effects. The dialect is very technical and frequently uses enigmatic symbols that are intended to hide the inner meanings from the vulgar. Therefore, it is imperative that the aspirant be introduced by a skilled Guru. Tantra is a system of religious rituals that channel the forces of the universe into the practitioner, bringing about emancipation. Mudras, mantras, prayers, meditation, and other yogic techniques that purify the body and spirit are among the "tools" one may employ in a Tantric practise. The term tantra is today misunderstood and associated with witchcraft, black magic, and a collection of methods for affecting people's minds, according to Dalrymple. The singer of the ancient Rajasthani epic poem Mohan Bhopa is another character in this work.

In front of Phad, the epic is always played, a lengthy narrative picture created on a strip of fabric that doubles as a movable temple for the god Pabuji as well as a representation of the story's key moments. Sound is the medium for music. It has been used by humans for a very long period and has acquired deep significance over the years. Because of its ability to impact people regardless of language, music is referred to as the "global language of mankind." The symbolic systems of music have immense power, and computer-generated music has a lot of potential. I compare how humans and computers recognise patterns in music, and I think that this comparison will be helpful for future research on both computer and human music cognition science. We humans can provide meaning to and derive meaning from every

symbolic system since we are a symbolic species. The emotive impact could have its origins in a shared musical experience among close friends. This is how music transmits and stores profound messages. Even language barriers cannot stop the power of music. It is obvious that music can elicit common emotional reactions. As a result, a lot of individuals believe that music is a different form of language, perhaps even the "global language of mankind." The Pabhuji Epic speaks the language of their God to the Bhopas.

Idol creator Srikanda Stapathy is from Tamil Nadu. The idols he created are merely sculptures in the sight of unbelievers, but in the eyes of the devout they being God. In their tradition, a statue may become God in three different ways: by the sculptor channelling divinity through his or her hands and heart; by participating in an invocation ceremony with the eyes chipped open; or by the devotee's faith. The idols serve as a conduit for communication amongst followers of God. The Shilpa shastras direct the sculptors as they establish guidelines about the proper proportion of each God so that people can accurately perceive their deity. The communication through these symbols also enables people to perceive the beauty of their deity.

CONCLUSION

By using a semiotic study of the work *Nine Lives in quest of the Golden Thing*, the paper could examine the connection between language and culture sacred in contemporary India. The protagonists in Dalrymple's works look for a way to comprehend spirituality and culture. They had to deal with a variety of indicators as they attempted to decipher the fundamental meaning of reality and their own society. To ascertain the truth, they attempt to organise these linguistic cues. Multiple cultures are a sign of the plurality of signified. There is an ultimate Unity, which is God, even among the many signifiers used by many religious traditions. One of the key ways that culture is transmitted is through language.
