

A Tragical History of Fusion and Hybridity

KAISER HAQ

White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India by William Dalrymple. London: Harper Collins. £8.99

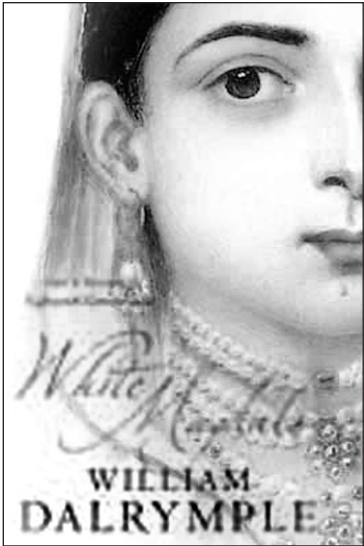
Barely out of Cambridge, William Dalrymple shot to fame with an unusual travel book, *In Xanadu* (1990: Yorkshire Post Best First Work Award, and a Scottish Arts Council Spring Book Award), and followed it up with other equally lauded explorations of things eastern: a book on Delhi, *City of Djinns* (1994: Thomas Cook Travel Book Award; Sunday Times Young British Writer of the Year Award); *From the Holy Mountain*, about the disappearance of Christianity from its region of origin (1997: Scottish Arts Council Autumn Book Award); and another book on India, *The Age of Kali* (1998). With his new book he attains new heights; it has won the prestigious Wolfson Prize for History and has been unanimously hailed as his masterpiece. One reviewer, overeager to be original in praising the book, has lapsed (or should I say collapsed?) into oxymoron: "Destined to become an instant classic." (It hardly needs explaining that something 'instant' does not need to go through the process of 'becoming'.)

Reviewers' howlers aside, the book is indeed a splendid achievement. Here is historical writing at its best, unputdownable as a thriller, and at the same time scholarly, urbane and, most significantly, humane. As for its theoretical bearings, 'White Mughals' distances itself critically from both imperialist and nationalist Indian historiography, from a particular kind of postcolonial criticism (exemplified par excellence by Edward Said's *Orientalism*), and from the more recent rhetoric of the 'clash of civilizations.' This makes for the virtue of timeliness.

We all know about the Nabobs, the early colonizers who acquired a taste for Oriental luxuries and often lived with Indian women, but they are remote figures in a historical limbo. We know about them, but we do not know them. They are generally seen as aberrant characters in a world where identity is conceived in clear-cut, stereotypical terms. But since Percival Spear's pioneering study *The Nabobs* (1963), a host of studies, nearly all of them published in the last few years have explored the phenomenon of cultural hybridization in fascinating detail. 'White Mughals' is perhaps the most wrieterly addition to the list. Almost simultaneously with it, Linda Colley's *Captives* has made available a comprehensive account of Europeans who were taken prisoner by Orientals and either by choice or under pressure adopted the religion and lifestyle of their captors.

Dalrymple points out that the period during which a hybrid lifestyle was common among Europeans in the East lasted three hundred years. It ended with the eighteenth century, as Western imperialism began to take shape. By the middle of the nineteenth century it was a thing of the past; and soon it was expunged from history.

Serendipity played a crucial role in the making of 'White Mughals.' On a visit to Hyderabad during Mohurrum in 1997 Dalrymple heard of Lt. Colonel James Achilles Kirkpatrick (a Scotsman like Dalrymple) who during his tenure as British Resident between 1797 and 1805 fell in love with, and married, Khair un-



Nissa, a young upper-class Hyderabad lady of Persian extraction, by whom he had a son and a daughter, whose descendants are still around in Britain.

Dalrymple fell in love with Hyderabad and spent five years uncovering the traces left by the couple. He sets the stage for their story by giving a comprehensive account of the extent of 'fusion and hybridity' in pre-Raj India and elsewhere. There were numerous Europeans who had 'turned Turk.' In India, the Portuguese, who arrived sixteen years before the Mughals (a piece of information that startled me), went native with great enthusiasm; when the Inquisition came after them they fled Goa and took service with Indian rulers. In 1565 there were at least two thousand Portuguese soldiers in Indian armies. There were so many Europeans in the Mughal army in the Empire's heyday 'that a special suburb was built for them outside Delhi called Firingi Pura.' In the late eighteenth century there were Frenchmen fighting for three rival powers, Tipu's Mysore, the Nizam's Hyderabad and the Marathas. A number of Europeans, including Britons, adopted Islam or Hinduism.

Against this background Kirkpatrick's relationship with Khair un-Nissa would not have been particularly remarkable if it weren't a case of the course of true love not running smooth. Kirkpatrick was the British Resident at Hyderabad at a particularly crucial point in Indian history, when the East India Company had to contend with Tipu Sultan and the Marathas. As a result of court intrigue an anonymous complaint reached the Governor General, charging that Kirkpatrick had raped Khair un-Nissa. He was

Kitty Kirkpatrick's First Letter to Her Grandmother Sharaf un-Nissa

My dear Grandmother,

I received many years ago, your kind letter of condolence with me on the death of my beloved brother. I was very grateful to you for it, tho' by my not having answered it, I am afraid that you may have thought that I little regarded it. But indeed I did, & the more so, because I felt that you too mourned for him I loved so well & that you too were connected with him by the binding ties of blood.

Two years after his death I was married to a nephew of Sir John Kennaway's. My husband is of my own age & is a Captain in the English army.

I have four children living, my eldest daughter is 11 years old. She is exactly like my husband. I have a boy of 8 years & a half, then another girl of 7 and a half who is exactly like my mothers picture & one darling infant of 19 months. I have had seven living children 1 sweet boy and two sweet girls are gone, but I am blest in those that survive. My boy is so striking an image of my father that a picture that was drawn of my father as a little boy is always taken for my boy. They have a good intellect & are blest with fair skin. I live in a nice pretty house in the midst of a garden on the sea coast. My dear husband is very kind to me & I love him greatly.

I often think of you and remember you and my dear mother. I often dream that I am with you in India and that I see you both in the room you used to sit in.

No day of my life has ever passed without my thinking of my dear mother. I can remember the verandah and the place where the tailors worked and a place on the house top where my mother used to let me sit down and slide.

When I dream of my mother I am in such joy to have found her again that I awake, or else am pained in finding that she cannot understand the English I speak. I can well recollect her cries when we left her and I can now see the place where she sat when we parted, and her tearing her long hair what worlds would I give to possess one lock of that beautiful and much loved hair! How dreadful to think that so many, many years have passed when it would have done my heart such good to think that you loved me & when I longed to write to you & tell you these feelings that I was never able to express, a letter which I was sure would have been detained & now how wonderful it is that after 35 years I am able for the first time to hear that you think of me, and love me, and have perhaps wondered why I did not write to you, and that you have thought me cold and insensible to such near dear ties. I thank God that he has opened for me a way of making the feelings of my heart known to you.

Will this reach you & will you care for the letter of your grandchild? My own heart tells me you will. May God bless you my own dear Grandmother.

cleared, thanks to the deposition of the chief minister of Hyderabad. Not long after, corrupt British army officers, whom Kirkpatrick had censured, anonymously reported to the Governor General that he was living with Khair un-Nissa, by whom he had had a child. This time his crime was concealment: while denying the first charge he hadn't come clean on his relationship with Khair un-Nissa. This time he was saved by his half-brother William, who was on the Governor General's staff, and reported that Kirkpatrick had informed him of the relationship, 'expecting him to pass it on discreetly to the Governor General,' but that he had neglected to do so.

Though Kirkpatrick did not lose his job, his friend General William Palmer, British Resident at Pune, who had married a Mughal lady and raised a family, was sacked, obviously because men like him were no longer considered desirable. The Kirkpatricks (or rather, Colonel Kirkpatrick) decided that their son and daughter should be sent to England to be educated, as this was the only way to save them from the stigma they would face as Anglo-Indians in India under new racist laws.

Soon after, Kirkpatrick died. Khair un-Nissa lived for another



TRAVEL WRITING

In this tale of banging around Beijing on a working tour, our ever intrepid photographer/gearhead shows us how fast thinking and native gall can even carry one past the watchful eyes of the Chinese Red Army.

Bluffing, bluffing, bluffing....

SHAHIDUL ALAM

"*Kemon achen?*" Mr. Li from the Chinese embassy greeted me in near perfect Bangla. I had an invitation to the Middle Kingdom, in Chinese, with a gold stamp and an embossed watermark. I felt important as he ushered me in to the spacious embassy building in Gulshan and offered me tea. Normally, I am not a tea drinker, but this elaborate concoction of herbs and berries steeped in water could hardly be refused. It didn't look anything like tea anyway, and I didn't want to appear rude. He brought pictures of China, gave me a video and showed me their photographic collection. However, despite all

over for a week, they now needed to entertain us, and arranged for us to see a dolphin show. Raghu and I both felt a side trip to China would be far more interesting. We had taken the train to Guangzhou, and found to our amazement Hindi music wafting down the aisles. Staid-looking Chinese passengers were glued to the train video, listening to "*Ichik dana bichik dana, dana r upar danaaaa*". I did have a three-month solo show at the Nikon Gallery in Richmond with that work, but that had been a long time ago, and I was looking forward to Beijing.

The last time I was in Beijing, a brief fly-in, fly-out, was on my way to Mongolia. My mother had

My old friend, Vincent Menzel, the picture editor of 'M' Magazine in the Netherlands, was there, as were Nicole Aebly of Lookat Pictures in Switzerland. Nicole was exactly as I'd imagined Heidi (as in the prototypical Heidi) to be, and I've never called her by any other name since. It was wonderful to find Bryn Campbell there. The first book on photography I had ever bought back in London in 1980 had been "World Photography" by Bryn. I had never before met the author of one of my favourite books. He too got a new name on that trip. Our charming hostess Jin Yan, called him "Mr. Campbell," and the name stuck.

Chinese hospitality made fit-

I opted for the solar-powered singing birds in small ornate cases. They were a great hit, but sadly, my own birds lie broken, one too many visiting child having treated them with too much affection. And then there were the extensive meal breaks. The Chinese meals I had been taught to expect, had a fixed sequence. You started with soup, had a couple of main meals and ended with dessert. I had not been warned about these thirty-course meals. Neither had I been told what sequence to expect. Soup and dessert came somewhere along the middle, and not knowing how many more dishes were awaiting my rapt attention, it was impossible to pace myself. My grandmother had always liked me because I was a big eater, and I hoped my Chinese hosts would have the same response to my overindulgence.

We survived the judging, the food, the trips to the sites, even the generous offers of massage by the stunning women on all the floors of the hotel, or the women pimps in Beijing streets. Even if I say so myself, I, the bearded man in panjabi pajama from Manjara (Chinese name for Bangladesh), was a great hit. Old women stopped me in the streets to stroke my beard, while kids pointed and giggled. And of course I had found my cyber café, Spark Ice, near the World Trade Centre. An 8-Remimbee ride by taxi, until I realised a bus was 1/400th the price. Later I discovered they had pre-paid Internet cards which I could use from my laptop in my hotel room and no longer had to run the gauntlet of the Beijing pimps.

In the rare moments when our hosts had left gaps in our itinerary, we would go walking down the side streets, generally at night. While there were still the Tai Chi people performing to music early in the morning, I missed the bird people I had seen in Guangzhou way back in '86. They would take their birds *avec cage*, for a walk in the park in the morning. Later they would take them to the tea stalls, and introduce them to friends over breakfast. I could spend hours photographing those tea stalls.

Meanwhile the floods were raging in Harbin (90 minutes by air from Beijing), and as photo-journalists we *had* to go there. There were a couple of snags. The Chinese government had completely banned foreign media from the flood-affected areas, and I didn't have my pass-

port. In China you need to show your passport even for domestic flights and mine was at the travel agents awaiting a permit for visiting The Tibetan Autonomous Regions. Bryn 'Campabell' sensibly passed on the idea, but Vincent and I decided to have a go, and our newfound Dutch friend Astrid, who worked for UNHCR in Beijing, joined us.

We landed at an airport near Harbin and managed to bluff our way out of it. We did have a contact through the journalists in the local radio station but our lead led to a dead end. So we hired a taxi and decided to try our luck. When the road led to the first of the many Chinese military checkpoints, with an immense degree of confidence we asked to immediately be taken to 'the leader'.

Bureaucracy loves to run along a single, well-grooved channel. And our technique worked like a charm on the intrinsic inertia of the bureaucrat, the fundamental urge of the bureaucrat to do nothing and pass the buck. By letting us through to 'the leader,' (saying the 'great helmsman' would have been too much, even for the likes of us!) the officers would avoid taking a decision themselves, would neatly avoid either permitting or denying us permission for whatever purpose we had really come for. They were passing the buck and they loved it. So we passed unimpeded, and merrily, through military checkpoints, gaining confidence as we progressed. And curiously, as the checkpoints became more imposing the farther we went, the more effective was our charade. The very fact that we had progressed that far gave us a degree of credibility that our bureaucrat friends were loathe to question.

Eventually we got to the river itself. The banks had indeed broken and the soldiers were working furiously with typical Chinese efficiency. It was impressive to watch. Still, we needed our 'leader' and repeated our plea to the most impressive-looking officer. He clicked his heels smartly and said he would take us to the control tower. Hey, we realized, we were going to get an audience. Quick thinking was necessary, and given our credentials as nationals of sea-level nations, we rightly felt we should present ourselves to 'the leader' as 'flood experts' from Bangladesh and Holland who had come to evaluate their flood prevention efforts.

The press and media officer

came along, and briefed us that the floodwaters had risen 14 metres in the last day. I dared to suggest that perhaps it was 14 centimetres, but the media officer was adamant. 14 metres was what his press briefing said, and that was what it was. It was an awkward moment, but then the leader arrived. An extremely polite gentleman who spoke little and gestured a lot. We were then asked whether we had a vehicle. When we mentioned that we had a taxi waiting, they asked us to let it go. This move had us worried: had they grown wise to our little caper? Not to worry. Soon we discovered that we were no mere mortals, but honest-to-goodness VIPs, and they were going to arrange a limousine for us. But first we had to join them for lunch, no doubt an extravagant Chinese affair. This unexpected turn of events required delicate handling. We had come on a morning flight and needed to catch the afternoon flight back. I had a meeting in Singapore the next afternoon and needed to catch the morning flight the following day. The others had similar plans. Still we couldn't refuse this hospitality. Eventually, imploring that our work was extremely urgent and we needed to hand in our report within the deadline, we managed to avoid the grand lunch, but they filled our limo with packed lunches and off we went (in a limousine!) to the heart of the flood-affected area.

I couldn't really get the shots I wanted from the limo, so a speedboat was arranged, and we went down the river. In many ways it was like Bangladesh, with families pooling together to share resources. Animals and people sharing the small bits of dry space. Makeshift tents where people were busy tending goats, cows and chicken. And as ever, children peering into the lens, making sure they utilised every photo op. We even got pictures of a political leader making a speech. With profuse thanks to 'the leader' and suitable congratulations for doing an excellent job, we scurried back to the airport, eager to exit before the VIP shine wore off.

A smooth take-off, much laughter on board, then back to Beijing, a flight to Singapore, and work, work, work!

Shahidul Alam heads Drik Picture Gallery in Dhaka.

eight years, in harrowing circumstances whose details I will not go into. We know that 'both she and her mother wrote desperate letters to England, begging and pleading for the children to be sent back to her.' To no avail.

In England the children were baptized and brought up by their grandfather. The son, Sahib Allun, became William George Kirkpatrick; the daughter Sahib Begum became Katherine Aurora Kirkpatrick (or Kitty). Carlyle was for a time their private tutor and quite smitten with Kitty, whom he immortalized as Blumine, the heroin of his famous (albeit unreadable) novel 'Santor Resartus': 'a many-tinted radiant aurora . . . this fairest of Oriental Light bringers.' William George became a minor poet who died young, leaving behind three daughters. As children they were not allowed to communicate with their mother or Indian grandmother. The latter however continued in her attempts to get in touch with them and on somehow learning of William George's death sent a condolence to Kitty. Years later Kitty, now married with children, re-established contact with her grandmother and kept up a moving correspondence till the latter's death six years later, 'one writing in English from Torquay, the other from Hyderabad dictating in Persian to a scribe who wrote on paper sprinkled with gold dust and enclosed in a *Kharita*, a sealed bag of gold Mughal brocade.' The death of people like Kitty Kirkpatrick, writes Dalrymple, 'effectively brought to a conclusion three hundred years of fusion and hybridity, all memory of which was erased from embarrassed Victorian history books . . . we still have rhetoric about "clashing civilizations," and almost daily generalizations in the press about East and West, Islam and Christianity, and the vast differences and fundamental gulfs that are said to separate the two. The White Mughals--with their unexpected minglings and fusions, their hybridity and above all their efforts at promoting tolerance and understanding--attempted to bridge these two worlds, and to some extent they succeeded in doing so . . . East and West are not irreconcilable, and never have been. Only bigotry, prejudice, racism and fear drive them apart. But they have met and mingled in the past; and they will do so again.'

Such words warm the cockles of my heart. But the sceptic in me points out that 'White Mughals' is a self-deconstructing account. Fusion and hybridity of the kind described here had their day when the balance of power between the Europeans and the Indians was not overwhelmingly in favour of the former. As the disparity in strength between them increased, illiberal, racist, colonialist ideas gained momentum. What chance do liberal ideas have in a world where the disparity in power between the most powerful and the rest is ever greater than in the days of Empire? To this the only answer I can think of is that history, mercifully, is open-ended. We can perhaps change.

I have it from the cyber-grapevine (by which of course I mean the Internet) that Dalrymple is at work on a book on the Mutiny, with the primary focus on Bahadur Shah Zafar. It's a book for which our *intizar* will be eager indeed.

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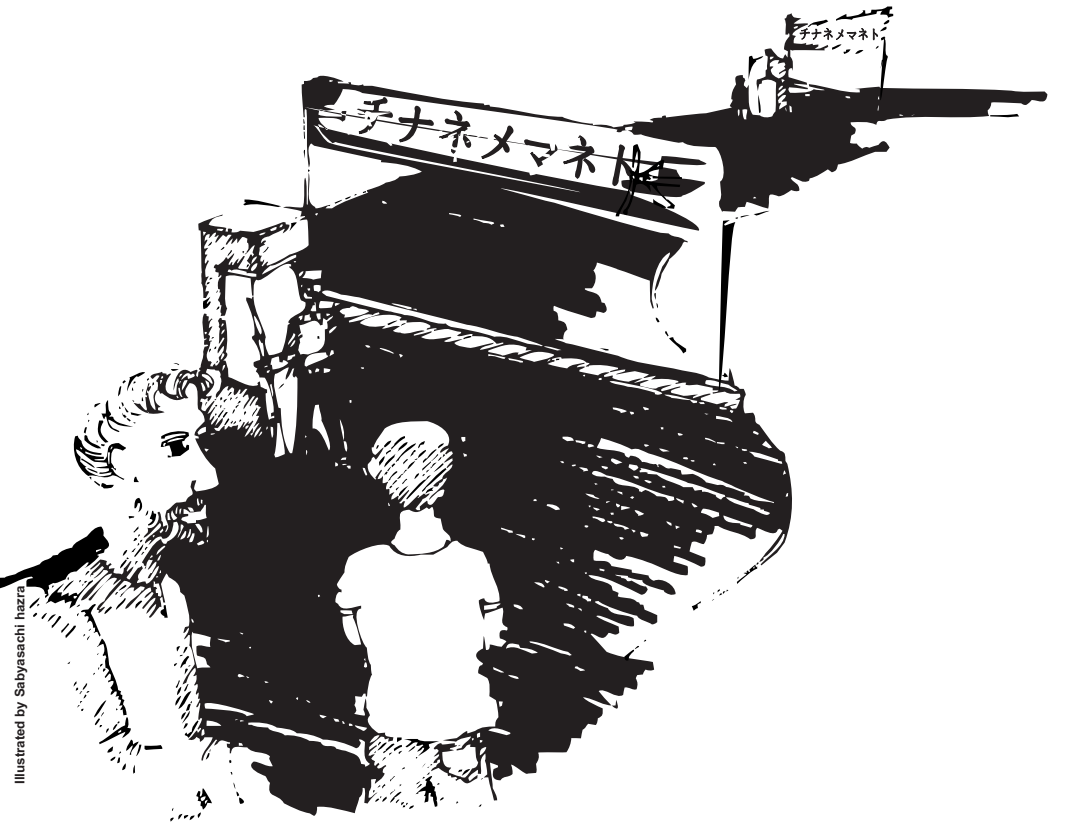
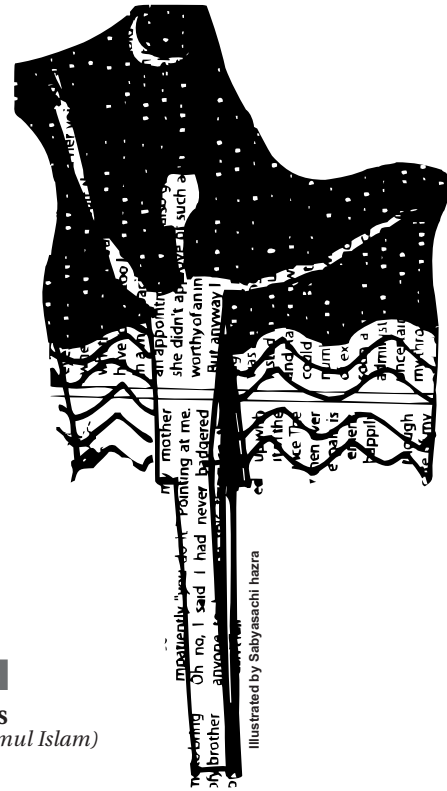
Walkaround

SHYAMOL KANTI DAS
(translated by Khademul Islam)

For long has the dust blown in front of the ferry mooring
For long have the coolieworkers slept beside brick-kilns
Somewhere is seen sparks from fires
Somewhere steam issues forth
Somewhere the tide no longer flows
And foam has gradually congealed to iron hardness

Oars none sailors none
At the back upturned lies the broken boat
Rotten fish scattered all around
Within the sand sighs the eagle's bones
I keep on walking, fording the river of delight
Here I spot the broken bangle, there the vermilion daub
I keep on walking, crossing tangles of barbed wire
And inside the lantern shiver
Cowardly love and Chaitra dusk

Bit by bit my country shrinks
And like blurry trees in a lifting curtain of fog
A foreign land blooms
And yet my walk along this dirt path does not come to an end
Does not come to an end, this long walkaround beneath a dark sky!



the fanfare, what he steadfastly refused to do was to issue me a multiple entry visa. I had half hoped this official invitation by the Mayor of Beijing, would make my subsequent trip to Tibet easier. Oh well!

My first trip to China had been in 1986. The Indian photographer Raghu Rai and I had been asked to judge the Standard Chartered Photography Contest in Hong Kong. The photographs weren't that great and we'd gone through them quickly. The organisers were embarrassed. Having gotten us, the judges,

wanted to go to China's capital city, and with the then Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan's help (he was an ex-bridge partner), *amma* had been given the red-carpet treatment by our High Commission. So that trip had been more for her than for me, and every time I'd rung up from Ulan Bator to talk to her all I would get was the dial tone: she was away, to the Great Wall, to the Forbidden City, or on some other adventure. So this time around (August of 1999) I was determined to see some of the city for myself.

ting in the judging difficult. We did go to the Great Wall and the Forbidden City and the usual tourist spots. I needed to get my shopping in. Luckily Pathshala (Drik's photography school in Dhaka) hadn't been set up then, but still, with all my Drik colleagues to think of, the children of "Out of Focus" program, and the neighbourhood children, I needed to shop smart. Cheap, light, not too fragile, interesting things in batches of fifty was what I was looking for. Fortunately there were plenty to choose from in China. Eventually