

the Mahāmakam tank at Kumbakonam as an irregular octagon (p. 163); in reality, it is four-sided.

Branfoot next turns to the sculptural component of the Nāyaka temple. Here he notes that the emphasis on niche carvings that characterizes the art of earlier periods now shifts to carvings on the columns that line the central aisles of corridors and *maṇḍapas*. The author traces the “liberation” of figural and animal sculptures from the confines of the column shaft, until it reaches a climax in huge, virtually three-dimensional compositions, such as those at Madurai, Tenkasi and Krishnapuram. The iconographic classification of Nāyaka plastic art that he presents here is without doubt the most comprehensive that has yet been attempted. Readers will appreciate the author’s useful distinction between fierce deities and epic heroes of all types, and more benign personalities, such as Manmatha and Rati, the divinities associated with erotic love, and figures drawn from *Kuṟuvañci*, the popular Tamil dance drama. The author’s discussion of temple sculpture continues with a chapter on royal portraiture, which he considers to be one of the most original aspects of Nāyaka art. Here Branfoot shows how sculpted effigies of particular rulers, many of whom can be identified with some certainty, are strategically positioned within the temple so as to “greet” deities as they are paraded through the monument. These carvings invariably depict kings with their hands held together in attitudes of adoration, thereby permitting historical figures “permanently” to interact with temple gods.

In his conclusion the author observes that the Tamilnadu temple style survives to the present day, and has even spread beyond South India, as evidenced by recently constructed Hindu monuments in Singapore, Durban, Hawaii, London and elsewhere. A glossary, bibliography and index are appended.

George Michell

PRITI KUMAR MITRA:

The Dissent of Nazrul Islam: Poetry and History.

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The Dissent of Nazrul Islam makes a significant contribution to the exploration of the history of ideas in South Asia. Mitra unravels the play of ideas in colonial India that inspired and influenced the dissenters while also explicating the concept of dissent. He locates Nazrul Islam as a product within the rubric of these ideas to trace his emergence as a poet, a thinker and a human being. In the introduction Mitra emphasizes the omission of Nazrul from historical studies which necessitated this study. Within the framework of dissent in South Asia he systematically draws out the particularities of Nazrul’s dissent. Mitra writes: “As a rebel he dissented against a number of orthodoxies – political, religious, social and literary – operative in the country. Marking the highest point of nationalist discontent, Nazrul, in his comprehensive rebellion against all orthodoxies, appears to represent a complex microcosm of the entire tradition”. In the three core chapters Mitra focuses on Nazrul’s dissent against the British colonial government in India, the Gandhian non-violent means of nationalist struggle, Islamic fundamentalism and Hindu cultural chauvinism, as well as the hegemony of Rabindranath Tagore in the world of Bengali literature. The painstaking research undertaken over several years answers many questions, just

as it poses several more, and Mitra is careful to keep his conclusion open, emphasizing the exploratory nature of the work. Sadly the untimely and sudden death of the author rules out further dialogue on Mitra's thesis.

The book leads us to ask whether Nazrul is a difficult subject for historical study because of his uncompromising dissent and the contrary positions he takes *vis-à-vis* the orthodoxies. Though Nazrul was regarded by some of his contemporaries as a representative of a new literature in Bengal, no group quite cohered around him as they did around some of his predecessors and contemporaries. Did the difficulty in categorizing the individualistic Nazrul into groups and/or movements result in his omission from historical enquiries? And why was Nazrul not appropriated by the dissenting movements of his day, which Mitra regards in his study as orthodoxies? In particular, why did Nazrul not gravitate towards Gandhi and Tagore, the greatest of icons of contemporary India?

The danger posed by Nazrul's dissent to the colonial government is amply illustrated by the number of his works that were banned by the British and by his two prison sentences. In his work *Nisiddho Nazrul* (1983), Sisir Kar gives details of when and how the various poems and collections came under the scrutiny of the colonial police and the Home Department and were banned. Nazrul was imprisoned for his poem "Anondomoyir Agomone", published in his own journal *Dhumketu*. Nazrul had definite problems with Gandhi's ambiguous concept of *swaraj* and with Gandhi's dogmatic stand on non-violence, and his iconic status, though Nazrul had a cordial meeting with Gandhi when the latter visited Hugli. Nazrul's sympathies lay at various times with the revolutionaries, with the communism of his old friend Muzaffar Ahmad and with the Labour Swaraj Party that he set up with three others. He aspired to complete independence with social and economic equality. Mitra notes a naivety in Nazrul's political stance as well as a lack of allegiance to any particular ideology. It is possible that Nazrul brought his uncompromising individuality and liberal creativity to his political beliefs, which prevented him from identifying with any definite and closed set of ideas. In an early article in *Nabojug* (1920) Nazrul writes: "Man is first born with natural mobility, freedom and pure simplicity" and it is significant that Shiva, the god of annihilation, was the deity of inspiration for Nazrul.

In the section on Nazrul's dissent against Islamic fundamentalism, Mitra makes the point that the "Rebel Poet" distanced himself equally from fundamentalist Islam and contemporary "Muslim renaissance". The exchange between Nazrul and the conservative and progressive Muslims both reflect that Nazrul's determined opposition to any attempt to categorize his work as "Muslim *sahityo*" and his own persona as that of a "Muslim poet", though in the 1930s he composed many *Islami Gan* and translated parts of the Quran. He was proud of being a Muslim but his identity transcended the boundaries of the religion of his birth. His wife continued to be a Hindu after her wedding and their children had names drawn from both their Muslim and Hindu heritage. There has been a tradition of syncretism in Bengal and, subconsciously, Nazrul seems to be partaking of that tradition with his fervent appeals for Hindu-Muslim unity. Mitra has not examined Nazrul in the context of this tradition. Nazrul's catholicity is traced to his unconventional childhood that exposed him both to the Muslim religious education of the *Maktab* and the Hindu (Puranic) tales through the folk form of *Leto*, which denotes a performing group. The poet was critical of Hindu hypocrisy and unlike Gandhi, who was merely critical of untouchability, Nazrul also attacked the entire caste system of the Hindus, and traced Hindu communalism to caste prejudice.

Mitra analyses Nazrul's battle against what he calls the literary orthodoxy that had gathered around Rabindranath Tagore in the last core chapter. He locates

Nazrul amidst the conflict between literary groups owing allegiance to the Tagorean path of literature and the proponents of New Literature. However, even here Nazrul operated as an individual and was not a member of the two radical literary groups. While the poets had shared a cordial relationship, Tagore seemed to disagree with the variety of realism and poverty that New Literature was portraying, as well as the language used, and Nazrul took some of the comments personally. While Nazrul respected the elder poet he was clearly not willing to accept Tagore as the arbiter of literary taste. He was evidently an iconoclast but in a display of remarkable contradiction he made heroes of Vivekananda and Mustafa Kamal.

A final observation about Mitra's categorization of Nazrul's dissents: it is clear that Nazrul's dissent against colonialism, Islamic fundamentalism and Hindu cultural chauvinism was an abiding preoccupation, but can the same be said of his opposition to Gandhi and Tagore's hegemony? The exchange with Tagore in particular occurs over a period of about six years. Undoubtedly Nazrul was attempting a writing style that was new and not Tagorean, but is the exchange with Tagore an iconoclastic expression rather than a sustained expression of dissent? Was Nazrul rebelling against a kind of writing or breaking existing forms to create the form most conducive to expressing his thoughts and feelings?

The Dissent of Nazrul Islam ably addresses a lacuna in the study of Nazrul Islam in South Asian history of ideas and enables a better understanding of the "Rebel Poet" and the genesis of his ideas and writing. A complex work such as this would be better served by a comprehensive index.

Sutanuka Ghosh

JOHN R. HINNELLS and ALAN WILLIAMS (eds):

Parsis in India and the Diaspora.

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In July 2006 John R. Hinnells brought together a group of leading scholars at the School of Oriental and African Studies for a research workshop on Parsis in India and the Diaspora. He and Alan Williams have now published thirteen of the resulting papers in a collection focusing on three key periods: the settlement from the eighth century, the development of the community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the diaspora. The authors offer different approaches to the subject: they include religious (Hinnells, Stewart, Choksy, Stausberg), social (Palsetia, Wadia, McLeod) and legal (Sharafi) historians, linguists (Williams), sociologists (Mehta) and archaeologists (Nanji and Dhalla). Rather than presenting broad surveys, the individual articles offer in-depth studies "in sharp focus and vivid colour" (Hinnells, p. 4), and each is part of a separate long-term research project. The book is dedicated to Faridoon and Mehraban Zartoshty, two brothers who, along with the late Mary Boyce, are the main benefactors for the study of Zoroastrianism at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

All the articles are based on original research, and many of them challenge established positions. Thus, Alan Williams, "The structure, significance and poetic integrity of the *Qesse-ye-Sanjān*" (pp. 15–34) questions its common reading as a "folk chronicle". Instead, he argues that the "key to understanding the apparent ahistoricity and inexactitude of the text is to see its fundamentally religious-mythological