

consumption of its regional arts and crafts”, (p. 237) – which is to say – how a public sense of Jaipur rests on what it manufactures and sells. In the case of Lucknow, the city’s distinct identity is said to be centred around the festival of Muharram and the visual culture (including architecture) associated with it. The essay offers a thought-provoking perspective, though the claim that these visualisations of cities are aspects “of the emergence of modernity” is insufficiently argued.

That the ‘normative’ spaces of idealised images or models of a city can be in tension with “the lived-in place of everyday experience” (p. 17) is a point to emerge especially from the section entitled ‘Social Practice and Everyday Life’ which contains some more anthropological essays. It opens with Nita Kumar’s study of the perception of space on various levels – home, neighbourhood and nation – by schoolchildren. Stefan Schütte discusses networking among the *dhobis* (washermen) of Banaras, members of a small caste group that is widely dispersed through the city. Martin Gaenzle focuses on Nepali residents and visitors and the parts of the city of particular significance to them.

The last chapter of the collection, by Vasudha Dalmia, is a work of literary criticism, a reading of Prem Chand’s novel *Sevasadan* (1918). Set against the backdrop of social change in Banaras in the early twentieth century, it tells the story of a neglected Brahman wife who chooses to become a courtesan, a position which she perceives as attracting greater social regard. Though her role model in this choice indeed commands a traditional measure of respect, the heroine makes her move at a time when such long-entrenched attitudes are under attack from zealous social reformers. The political debate about whether the courtesans should be removed from the city centre however, turns in the end less on moral than on communal concerns. In a thoroughly engaging analysis of its plot and principal characters, Dalmia reveals both the novel’s satirical edge and the insight it provides into the social and political life of the city’s elite at a moment in history.

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THE TRIUMPH OF MODERNISM: INDIA’S ARTISTS AND THE AVANT-GARDE 1922–1947. By PARTHA MITTER. pp. 271, London, Reaktion Books, 2007.  
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There is a conundrum familiar to historians of modern art that is often dubbed ‘Picasso and the Africans’. How is it, one asks, that Picasso’s adaptations of African sculpture are generally seen as brilliantly inventive and original, while any assimilation of European modernism by African or Asian artists is often derided as derivative? Does the seeming double standard reflect nothing deeper than a continuing prejudice of the sort that was common in the colonial era? Partha Mitter’s engrossing new book goes some way towards addressing this issue in relation to painting in late colonial India.

The quarter-century preceding Independence in 1947 was a rich period for Indian art, laying the foundations for the various scene we find today. It was marked by Indian artists’ adoption of some of the diverse modes of the western avant-garde, as seen in the poetic cubism of Gaganendranath Tagore and various versions of primitivism, from the naïve watercolours of Sunayani Devi and the pastoralist idylls of Amrita Sher-Gil, to the untutored introspective visions of Rabindranath Tagore. An obsession with the local tribal people amongst artists of the Santiniketan School was carried forward to fashion the distinctive primitive idiom of Jamini Roy.

All of these artists have been written about before, though mostly individually and in Indian publications and exhibition catalogues that are not readily available to the general reader. Mitter’s well-illustrated survey, *The Triumph of Modernism*, contains brilliant essays on each of them and brings

them together for the appreciation of a wider audience. Along the way, he highlights some seminal but hardly noticed exhibitions that served as milestones, such as the Bauhaus exhibition in Calcutta in 1922, and an exhibition of modern Indian art at the Burlington Galleries in London in 1934.

From the outset, Mitter resists the notion that we should understand the work of the Indian modernists as signs of western 'influence', a traditional view that locks Indian artists into a dependent relationship and characterises their work as derivative. He prefers to see their responses to the West as active rather than passive: the colonised artists made conscious choices, redeploying the syntax of the avant-garde for their own ends. But what were those ends? Mitter identifies their primitivism as part of a wider challenge to the colonial urban civilisation. Many nationalists saw the village rather than the city as the authentic expression of India, and found an alternative to western rationality in a version of primitivism that was grounded in eastern thought, in a Tagorean move back to the hermitage in the forest.

Indian nationalism was overtly part of the artistic agenda in the preceding period (covered by Partha Mitter's previous book, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922*) when Abanindranath and the new school of Orientalist artists had established themselves. Their outlook therefore certainly provides a context for interpreting the modernists who followed, but it is not clear how far this reading reflects their own personal intentions, which are crucial if we are to think in terms of artists making deliberate choices rather than merely responding to external influences. Amrita Sher-Gil was more interested in social concerns that she is usually given credit for, but she was too cosmopolitan to make a nationalist. Rabindranath's drawings, as Mitter points out, were essentially private expressions; and Jamini Roy was a recluse. Only Nandalal Bose attempted direct political engagement with the nationalist cause, and briefly with some success, but he soon became disenchanted and withdrew. Despite Mahatma Gandhi's early encouragement to Nandalal, he and other leading nationalist figures for their part were surprisingly indifferent to the potential of visual art to express and disseminate nationalist views.

We might also question whether modernism did actually triumph so early as this in India. The later parts of the book shows how, aside from the mavericks, the period was dominated by a tussle between Orientalists of the post-Abanindranath generation (still looking backwards to reclaim Indian history and redefine it through an aesthetic derived from ancient India) and academic realism, represented most strongly at this time by H. Mazumdar and the Bombay School of Art under W.E.G. Solomon. The rivalry between these two groups became overt in the competition to bag commissions to paint murals for New Delhi and India House in London. Round One of this squabble (over Delhi) went to the Bombay School, though the prize was reduced in scale as Lutyens refused to let any Indian artists work on Viceroy's House. Round Two (over London) went to the Bengalis, though this project too was curtailed before completion. Mitter describes the competition between these factions as a case of 'contested nationalism' – a disagreement over which style of art best represents India. But his account shows that it had as much to do with regional and personal ambitions, including those of colonial officials.

The select band of primitivists here defined as the modernists did not feature in these high-profile commissions, which suggests that the period as a whole was not simply the tale of their triumph. *The Last Gasp of Academic Realism* might have been a less evocative but more accurate title. Before 1947 the modernists were in a minority, though they certainly facilitated the later decisive rejection of colonial art schools methods that was made by the subsequent generation, after Independence.

The book's compelling subtext is about how looking at these Indian images changes our perspective on modernism globally. We see it as more diffused. With regard to the mechanism of that spread, Mitter deconstructs any idea of one discrete culture influencing another, replacing it with a pattern of cultural interaction. After all, some of the Bauhaus artists engaged with Indian mysticism, while re-inventing

it for their own purposes; and if Modernism became an international currency then Indian artists' responses to some of its formal means could reasonably be called the other side of the same coin.

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BODY LANGUAGE. INDIC ŚĀRĪRA AND SHĒLĪ IN THE MAHĀPARINIRVĀṆA-SŪTRA AND SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA. By JONATHAN A. SILK. (Studia Philologica Buddhica, Monograph Series XIX) pp. 102. The International Institute for Buddhist Studies of The International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies, Tokyo, 2006.  
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The basic meaning of the Sanskrit expression *śārīra* (in Pāli *saṅgī*) is 'body', but it appears most frequently in the Pāli texts in the compound *saṅgīpūjā* usually translated as 'relic worship'. In the context of Buddhism it refers to the worship of the Buddha's relics usually enshrined in a stūpa. The worship of the relics of the Buddha, both by his lay followers and monks, has been a widespread feature of Buddhist devotional practice since very early times if not right from the day on which the Buddha died and was cremated (probably in 483 BC). When the great Emperor Aśoka (c. 269–232 BC) converted to Buddhism, he built many stūpas all over his realm and enshrined in them splinters of relics from the original eight stūpas. Later, when relics were no longer available, manuscripts of *sūtras* were substituted indicating the presence of the Dharma and eventually stūpas came to be venerated as symbols of the presence of the Buddha or of the eternal Dharma even if they did not contain anything.

Practically every Buddhist monastery has a stūpa in its precinct. To begin with the worship of the Buddha's relics by monks may not have been permitted practice since, strictly speaking, their sole task was to aim for their individual liberation from rebirth by following the Buddha's instructions; any attachment to external phenomena or special regard for some of them even if they had a link to the personality of the Buddha while he was alive would be regarded as an obstacle on the path to freedom. But the matter still appears not quite resolved.

With lay followers of the Buddha's teaching it was different. Reverence for anything which would have had some link to his person would have been regarded as a help on the spiritual path and a guarantee of a favourable rebirth. Many people would expect from it also worldly benefits such as health, well-being and prosperity and some ascribed to the Buddha's relics magic powers which they could use to their advantage if they were in possession of them. To own them was therefore an ambition particularly of kings and chiefs of communities so that they apparently would not even shrink from a fight to acquire them. As reported in the Pāli *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, after the Buddha's cremation the king of Magadha, five aristocratic clans including Sakyas (the Buddha's clansmen), a Brahminic settlement and two communities of the Malla tribe claimed the relics. The Malla community on whose territory the Buddha passed away initially refused to part with any portion of them. All the claimants promised to erect a stūpa over the relics and hold a festival honouring them. As transpires from the words of the Brahmin Doṇa, a follower of the Buddha and himself a famous teacher who was also present, strife was brewing, with possible 'war and bloodshed', over the custody of the Buddha's relics. So Doṇa suggested their partition into eight portions and his authority prevailed. Verses at the end of the *sutta* (probably a later interpolation) mention that apart from the distributed bones, four teeth of the Buddha were preserved separately. One is in *tāvātimsa* heaven, brought there, according to a commentary, by the god Sakka/Indra who took it from Doṇa as he tried to hide it in his turban, one became the object of worship in the city of Gandhāra, another is revered by Kings of the Nāgas and one was brought to the country of Kāliṅga from where, according to later accounts, it was sent for security reasons to Sri Lanka (where it is still worshipped in the specially built Temple of the Tooth