

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

conception and design” (p. 21). The compositional structure he detects consists of five parts: introduction, three central sections and conclusion. Each has an internal threefold structure, which Williams correlates with the Zoroastrian cosmological stages of “creation” (*bundahišn*), “mixture” (*gumēzišn*) and “resolution” (*wizārišn*) (p. 25).

The archaeological evidence for “The landing of the Zoroastrians at Sanjan” in Gujarat is examined by Rukshana Nanji and Homi Dhalla (pp. 35–58). On the basis of excavations carried out from 2002–04 by the World Zarathushti Cultural Foundation, they date the Zoroastrian presence at Sanjan to the early to mid-eighth century CE and argue that such migrants settled in a place that had already been an Iranian trading outpost during the Sasanian period. They consisted chiefly of mercantile groups who “would have been the impetus for the increased trade in the eighth and early ninth centuries” (p. 53). It is likely that many subsequent migrations took place. The excavations of the *dokhma* show clearly that from an early date there was a large Zoroastrian population. The ceramics found in the mortar of the building material indicate that the *dokhma* was constructed between the tenth and twelfth centuries, while bone samples suggest that it was last used between 1410 and 1450 CE. This makes it the earliest *dokhma* on Indian soil (p. 50). After the sack of Sanjan, probably in 1465 (S. H. Hodivala, *Studies in Parsi History*, Bombay 1920, pp. 37–66), the Atash Behram was taken to Bansda.

Sarah Stewart, “Parsi prayer and devotional song in the Indian diaspora” (pp. 59–77), examines the relationship in lay Parsi devotional life between ancient Zoroastrian prayers and a Parsi Gujarati song, the *Atash nu Git* or “Song of the Fire”. The latter was composed in 1765 by laymen, and celebrates the participation of both laymen and women in the founding of the second Atash Behram in India. Subsequently the song was transferred from the temple sphere into the realm of female devotional life, and since then has traditionally been recited by women when preparing the hearth fire on the name-day feast of fire, for weddings and sometimes *navjotes*. Stewart suggests that after the hearth fire had been elevated to the temple fire, the latter re-entered the domestic sphere in the form of the *Atash nu Git*, which thus represents “the domestication of the temple fire” (pp. 67, 71 f.).

In “Partner in empire: Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and the public culture of nineteenth-century Bombay” (pp. 81–99), Jesse S. Palsetia explores the collaborative relationship between Parsis and the British within the confines of colonialism. Using Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (1783–1859) as an example, he argues that Indian notables “utilized the very mechanisms of British authority to satisfy Indian requirements” (p. 86). Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy raised his public profile by promoting both his social status in Bombay society and his personal involvement in decision making alongside the British (p. 87). For instance, he was the first colonial subject to enter into partnership with the British for the purpose of developing large-scale charitable projects, in particular the Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Hospital. At the time of his death on 15 April 1859, his charitable gifts were in excess of £245,000 (p. 87). Having received the first Indian knighthood in 1842, his many socio-political contacts in both India and Britain culminated in Queen Victoria conferring on him the first Indian baronetcy on 24 May 1857 (p. 94).

John R. Hinnells, “Changing perceptions of authority among Parsis in British India” (pp. 100–118) argues that the Parsi community has lacked a clear concept of authority since the migration from Iran. He shows the various transfers of authority which have occurred within the Parsi community: from one religious centre to another (Navsari to Bombay) and from one family to another (from the Wadias via the Jejeebhoy to the Readymoneys and Adenwallas). Moreover, authority was also

transferred from Parsi institutions, such as the Panchayats and Anjumans, to Muslim, Hindu or British law courts. While there used to be a hierarchy of authority between different priestly families, the order in Navsari was different from that in Bombay. Hinnells emphasizes the significance of Anjuman meetings and the predominance they had even over the dasturs, although there were disputes over who had the authority to call such a gathering.

Rusheed R. Wadia's article on "Bombay Parsi merchants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (pp. 119–35) surveys Parsi economic history under British colonial rule, focusing on Parsi merchant activities and commercial networks of friends and relatives. He highlights the link between their business and their community formation. The latter was strengthened, for instance, by the institution of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, by Parsi protest against the June 1832 Government ruling sanctioning the killing of stray dogs, by joint opposition to Christian missionary activity, by an increased awareness of their Iranian heritage, and by a legal framework regulating community life (p. 129).

John McLeod, "Mourning, philanthropy, and M. M. Bhownagree's road to Parliament" (pp. 136–55) studies the projects which Sir Mancherjee Merwanjee Bhownagree (1851–1933) undertook to commemorate his deceased sister Awabai (1869–88), whom he had raised since the death of their father in 1872. Awabai was bright and well educated, and her elder brother regarded her as the model of a modern Indian woman. Bhownagree dealt with the profound depression resulting from her sudden death by merging the "Victorian tradition of mourning through public monuments with the Parsi custom of charity in commemoration of the deceased" (p. 151). In memory of his sister, he undertook several charitable projects, all of which reflected his commitment to female education, medicine, and the British Empire. McLeod argues that the failure of the memorial hall project in Bombay contributed to Bhownagree's 1892 decision to transfer his home to London (pp. 147 f.). His donation of £3,000 for a corridor at the London Imperial Institute had the dual purpose of commemorating his deceased sister and strengthening his own position in high society (pp. 146, 151), and coincided with his entry into Parliament in 1895 (p. 149).

Mitra Sharafi, "Judging conversion to Zoroastrianism: behind the scenes of the Parsi Panchayat case (1908)" (pp. 159–80) offers new insights into *Petit v. Jijibhai*, the court case about the conversion to Zoroastrianism of the French Soonu Tata, née Suzanne Brière, after her marriage to R. D. Tata in 1903. Sharafi examines what happened in the courtroom during the nine weeks of the hearings – from 7 February to 13 April 1908 – and between 13 April and the delivery of the court's decision seven months later on 28 November 1908. (On p. 165 the date is given as 27 November, but Sharafi confirmed that on the published judgment the date given is 28 November 1908.) The two judges, Dinshaw Davar, who became the first Parsi judge of the Bombay High Court on 9 November 1906, and Frank Beaman, were both initially in favour of limited conversion. However, Davar first changed his mind and adopted an anti-conversion stance midway through the hearings between 7 March and 13 April, and then Beaman yielded to him between 13 April and 28 November 1908 (p. 165), for "Davar dominated Beaman by force of personality, seniority and membership of the Parsi community" (p. 174). Drawing on unpublished case papers and Davar and Beaman's judgment notebooks, which she discovered in the archives of the Bombay High Court, Sharafi argues that Davar's volte-face was influenced by the expert witness of the scholar-priest J. J. Modi, who took an anti-conversion position in the courtroom, although previously favouring limited conversion in his published work. While the legal record offers no clues as to how Davar and Modi's change of mind

came about, on the basis of external evidence Sharafi suggests that both men were influenced by the Parsi orthodox solicitor and charismatic orator J. J. Vimadala (pp. 161, 170).

Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Iranians and Indians on the shores of Serendib (Sri Lanka)" (pp. 181–210) surveys the history of the Sri Lankan Zoroastrian diaspora, which goes back at least to Achaemenid times. From the sixteenth century onwards, his account is partly based on unpublished records compiled by Kaikhosru D. Choksy (1863–1938), who migrated from Bombay to Sri Lanka in 1884 first as bookkeeper, but subsequently becoming manager and finally corporate attorney of the Parsi firm Framjee Bhikhajee and Company (p. 190). Parsis worked as planners, made fortunes as merchants and involved themselves in politics and social activities. Their numbers peaked at around 400 members between 1930 and 1945, when Sri Lanka was British Ceylon (p. 192). After the island became independent in 1947 nearly half of the Parsi population returned to India. Others left for the USA and Canada in 1972 to seek out better educational and economic opportunities, when Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka (pp. 193 f.). By 2006, only sixty-one Parsis remained in Sri Lanka, constituting just over 0.0003 per cent of the island's total population of 18.76 million (p. 204). For many centuries Parsi ritual, social and funerary affairs had been administered by a range of charitable funds and trusts (p. 195), until in 1939 the Ceylon Parsi Anjuman was established. Its funds are generated through annual membership fees and voluntary donations, and the three trustees are elected every five years. The Anjuman has authority over both priests and laity. Its charter defines a Zoroastrian as a person whose father is a Parsi or Iranian Zoroastrian and who has undergone the *navjote* initiation. By contrast, children of Zoroastrian mothers but non-Zoroastrian fathers have no valid claim to community membership (p. 198).

Gillian Mary Towler Mehta's article on "Zoroastrians in Europe 1976 to 2003: continuity and change" (pp. 211–35) discusses the attitudes of European Zoroastrians, especially women, to the purity laws concerning menstruation and child birth. Her data, which she obtained from a postal questionnaire survey carried out in 2003, suggests that more women than men affirmed such regulations. Moreover, within the female sub-group the older, less educated individuals who came to Europe as adults from Pakistan, India and East Africa were more in favour of observing them than the younger, intermarried, highly educated ones who were either born in Europe or came to Europe as young children. Most Iranian Zoroastrians also rejected the purity laws (pp. 226 f.).

Michael Stausberg, "Para-Zoroastrianisms: memetic transmission and appropriations" (pp. 236–54) outlines seven reconfigurations of Zoroastrian features by individuals who were not born into the ethnic religion. He refers to such features as "memes", a term coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976, and to their movement from one cultural or religious context to another as "memetic migration" (pp. 236 f.). Unless they are kept strictly secret, religious memes "easily spread across the boundaries of the communities that claim possession of them" and may change ("mutate") as they are adapted to different cultural contexts (p. 237). The first of the seven sketches discusses various uses of Zarathustra's name as a memetic unit. These include not only texts ascribed to the Iranian prophet, such as the so-called *Chaldean Oracles* and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* of 1883–85, but also the bronze statue of a gigantic male nude by the Australian sculptor Peter Schippenheyn (pp. 238–41). The other six sketches concern religious movements that in one way or other "reinvent Zoroastrianism" outside the ethnic boundaries of established Zoroastrian communities (p. 242). They cover Mazdasnan (pp. 242–4), Dastur Sraosha Kaul (pp. 244 f.), The

Mazdayasni Zarathushti Anjuman, subsequently renamed The International Mazdayasnan Order (pp. 245 f.), the Zarathushtrian Assembly with its figurehead Ali Akbar Jafarey (pp. 246–8), the former Swedish pop-star Alexander Bard (pp. 248 f.) and, finally, the esoteric Astro-Zurvanism of the post-Soviet media celebrity Pavel Pavlovič Globa (born 1953) with his Avestan Schools of Astrology (pp. 249–51).

Finally, John R. Hinnells, “Parsis in India and their diasporas in the twentieth century and beyond” (pp. 255–76) highlights Parsi achievement in the twentieth century and counters the idea that their influence and standing has declined since the 1900s. He shows that Parsis continued to do well in politics (Shapurji Saklatvala, Khurshed Nariman, Firoze Gandhi, Homi J.H. Talyarkhan, Sir Homi Mody, Jamshed Mehta, Jamshid Marker) and to excel in the professions (Field Marshal Sam Maneckshaw, India’s Attorney General Soli Sorabji and Solicitor General Tehmtan Andhyarunjia, and others), industry (Tata Companies and the Godrej family firm), sport (especially cricket), the arts (the conductor Zubin Mehta, the pop-star Freddie Mercury, the novelists Rohinton Mistry and Bapsi Sidhwa) and science (Homi Bhabha). Hinnells then discusses changes in twentieth-century Parsi religious belief and practice, such as *Ilm-i Khshnoom* or “path of knowledge”, which is their version of theosophy, as well as some of its leaders (Dr Meher Master-Moos, Adi Doctor and K. N. Dastoor), the reformist effect of Dastur M. N. Dhalla, Hindu influence on Dastur Bode, and the orthodox position of Khojeste Mistree and his “Zoroastrian Studies”. He also addresses recent developments in the debate about mixed marriages, in particular the foundation of an Association of Intermarried Zoroastrians in 1992 following the tragic death of Roxan Shah in 1990 (pp. 262–5). After surveying the twentieth-century Parsi Zoroastrian diasporas in Britain, where Zoroastrianism is one of the nine formally recognized religions (p. 267), and also in North America and Australia, Hinnells discusses the World Zoroastrian Organisation (WZO), various unsuccessful attempts to form a world body, and demographic figures. He concludes that declining numbers in India and assimilation in the diaspora could be seen to indicate that the religion is under threat, but that Zoroastrianism still remains a dynamic religion which continues to produce major achievers around the world (p. 273).

While each chapter is a self-contained unit, coherence of the volume as a whole is created by themes interspersed throughout the book and numerous cross-references between the individual articles. Such common motifs include poetic structure (Williams, Stewart), the landing of the Parsis at Sanjan (Williams, Nanji and Dhalla), Parsi charity as a means of raising one’s public profile and promoting Indian interests (Palsetia, Wadia, McLeod), intermarriage (Hinnells, Sharafi, Choksy) and religious authority (Hinnells, Choksy). Overall, this collection presents a fascinating, multifaceted picture of a most remarkable religious minority whose cultural, intellectual and economic influence has been enormous and totally out of proportion to its numerically microscopic size. It again illustrates the Zoroastrians’ extraordinary ability not only to adjust to different cultural contexts and political situations, but also to contribute to whatever society they live in as a diaspora community. This important book offers a wealth of information and deep, at times revealing, insights which the general reader will find illuminating and the professional scholar indispensable.

**Almut Hintze**