

ment works of modern political economy, *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare* also furnishes a basis for reading through the less clearly marked mystifications of contemporary culture.

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Naqi Husain Jafri, ed. *Critical Theory: Perspectives from Asia*. New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia / Creative Books, 2004. Pp. 405. Rs. 700 hardback.

This book comprises sixteen essays and is the second volume in the series, *Studies in Literature and Ideas*. The book seeks to create a position for poetics of the once-colonized peoples in English. The objective of the book is a reappraisal of Sanskrit, Tamil, Arabic, Persian and Urdu poetics which have been studied separately but perhaps not as offering vistas from Asia. The scope of the book may sound grand at first sight, but it manages to do an excellent job.

Though the book apparently seeks to showcase Asian poetic traditions, it focuses primarily on the Muslim world. This is no shortcoming and is actually a boon in disguise. Muslims have made immense contributions to these traditions as well as to the cultural sphere. *Critical Theory* fulfils a major lack. The first essay, Al-Baqillani's "A Tenth Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism," is a rare find. It discusses the eloquence, rhetorical characteristics, succinct style, and the metaphors of the Holy *Qur'ān*. The essay is a brilliant example of scholarly, hermeneutical exegesis and interpretation. Its style is lucid and clear. Baqillani gives excellent examples to illustrate various literary aspects of the Holy Book. In one such example, he quotes: "Generosity does not wipe out a fortune as long as luck is favourable; nor does stinginess conserve a fortune as long as luck is unfavourable" (41). One must also praise the detailed and comprehensive footnotes to this essay.

There are two essays by the well-known Urdu critic and stalwart, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of Sabk-i-Hindi" and "Khusrau's Poetics," which make for interesting reading. The first essay strikes one as being written on a grand scale as it runs into well over a hundred pages. Other important essays include Asloob Ahmad Ansari's "Poetics of Urdu *Ghazal*" and Shikoh Mohsin Mirza's "Poetics of Oriental Prose Narrative: *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* as Template." They make for informative and enlightening reading. Naqi Husain Jafri and Shikoh Mohsin Mirza have translated Ansari's essay into English. The only complaint here is that Ansari's

essay quotes a number of couplets from Urdu but they are left transliterated in a Romanized English, without any translation. Surely, the book is meant for an English scholarly audience and they may not be expected to know the original Urdu.

Out of the sixteen essays, there is a substantial space devoted to Sanskrit. But it is Natyasastra who hogs most of it. M. S. Kushwaha's essay is like a brilliant but short piece of wit—an excellent survey of the Sanskrit poetics that only leaves the reader asking for more. Makarand Paranjape's essay, "How (Not) To Read a Classical Indian Text: The First *Adhyaya* of the *Natyasastra*," makes certain important points about approaching classical Indian texts and states that they should not be dealt within the rubrics of Western critical tradition.

From the Sanskrit of the north, if one journeys to the south, one realizes that Tamil poetics could have been better represented. The essay on Tamil poetics, Nirmal Selvamony's "The Ontology of the Work of Art: An Introduction to Tamil Poetics," does deal with the great Tamil classical work of poetics, *tolkappiyam*, but does so in a rather cursory manner. About half of the essay deals with explanations from Western critics on the nature of works of art, and *tolkappiyam* finds space only much later. Interestingly, there is no mention of the kind of performance-based genres of *akam* and *puram* found in Tamil poetry of the period. Scholars such as A. K. Ramanujan, Stuart Blackburn, Arjun Appadurai, and R. Parthasarthy have done extensive work on the area.

The only essay that makes a jarring note in the book's theoretical framework is that of R. Azhagarasan. His essay is entitled "The Challenge of *Dalit* Literature." To be fair to the author, it is not a badly written essay and it espouses the cause of writings by *dalit* or marginal people. However, the essay has nothing to do with critical theory.

Despite its limitations, *Critical Theory* is an important work that opens up the vistas of Asian, predominantly Muslim, poetics to the world at large.

Works Cited

Al-Baqillani. "A Tenth Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism." *Critical Theory: Perspectives from Asia*. Ed. Naqi Husain Jafri. New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia / Creative Books, 2004.

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