

interregional and intraregional disparities. All these diverse factors have continued, Talbot argues, to disrupt nation building and development over the subsequent half-century of Pakistan's existence.

In this volume, Talbot proceeds chronologically to recount the disappointing circumstances and policies of Pakistan's civilian and military rulers through 1998, the first year of Nawaz Sharif's second incumbency. While Talbot regards some rulers, including Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Liaqat Ali Khan, Ayub Khan, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, as having held special promise, and others, including Zia al-Haq, as particularly harmful, each ruler ultimately failed to deliver and left Pakistan worse off than before. Talbot entitles the final part of his book "Ever-decreasing Circles," as Pakistan has spiraled downward since 1988. Yet Talbot does not doubt Pakistan's future existence as a nation.

Talbot's own formula for Pakistan's improved future requires a revival of the preindependence Unionist Party's culture of "consociational, accommodationist politics" (p. 5). He calls for the proportional representation of all of Pakistan's culturally and economically diverse groups in the political process. He further advises that, to allay the fears of Pakistan's other, much smaller provinces about the "Punjabisation of Pakistan," that disproportionately large and internally diverse province should be divided into three (pp. 371–72). Overall, Talbot prescribes for Pakistan's leaders "the five C's of consensus, consent, commitment, conviction and compassion" as "Pakistan's best hope for the future" (pp. 373–74).

Talbot's fine analysis of Pakistan's political history displays both his comprehensive knowledge and his commitment to its improvement. Although Talbot differs in places with Ayesha Jalal, he largely concurs with her larger interpretations in her *Democracy and Authoritarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *State of Martial Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Talbot's scholarly political analysis compares well with Shahid Javed Burki's well-informed but more generous economic and political narrative, *Pakistan: Fifty Years of Nationhood*, 3rd edition (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999). While Talbot writes of the exclusivist "rantings of Islamic ideologues" (p. 6), Burki reflects a more Islamicist interpretation of Pakistani history; they particularly disagree about the significance of General Zia al-Haq's eleven-year rule.

Talbot's book will be essential reading for scholars and students seeking an informed narrative of Pakistani political history. Centering on West Pakistani politics, his narrative reflects the marginalization of East Pakistan even before it split off as Bangladesh in 1971. Although he demonstrates a sound knowledge of political science theory, and appropriately refers to it as relevant, he concentrates on his political narrative about Pakistan. He draws on public records and private papers, and interviews with leading figures, as well as his extensive reading of journalistic and secondary sources. His extensive appendices provide brief biographies of leading politicians and descriptions of political parties and organizations. If he occasionally expects his readers to comprehend allusions to particular events in the Pakistani news, especially in his chapter on recent developments, overall he writes for the general reader. Alas, this narrative proves a sad one about "the Hobbesian jungle which is contemporary Pakistan" (p. 40).

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The Thakali: A Himalayan Ethnography. By MICHAEL VINDING. London: Serindia Publications, 1998. ix, 470 pp.

The Thak Khola (“the valley of Thak”), is one of the two most popular trekking areas in Nepal. The spectacular trail along this valley, located between the high mountains of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna, leads from the midhill region up to the remote Kingdom of Mustang which geographically belongs to the Tiberan plateau. But the uniqueness of the valley has not only attracted trekkers, it has also caught the interest of numerous anthropologists. The Thakali, the people of the central Thak Valley, are probably, as the author of this monograph states at the outset, “the most studied groups of Nepal” (p. 1), perhaps competing in this respect only with the Sherpa. Vinding meticulously lists all the previous ethnographers and scholars, including such names as Giuseppe Tucci, D. L. Snellgrove, and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf. But the author makes it clear that his book is meant to be the first *comprehensive* ethnographic monograph.

This holistic claim is already apparent from the somewhat old-fashioned title. And indeed the structure of the book is much like that in the early genre of report ethnography, with chapter headings like “Making a Living,” “Kinship and Affinity,” “Clans and Lineages,” “Marriage,” “The Political System,” and “Religion.” The author has an inclination to present detailed descriptive accounts and lists, but hesitates to give an interpretation of these facts which sometimes makes dull reading (at least for the nonexpert). Vinding is not much interested in general issues of anthropological theory. The strength of the book, however, is in the ethnography. It is obvious that Vinding has acquired an unusually intimate knowledge of his field. His research extends over a period of twenty-five years (1972–1997)! He thus was able to achieve good competence in the Thakali language, study in depth the related literature (including some Tibetan texts), and observe the changes of Thakali culture over this crucial stretch of time. The book contains the results of this extended fieldwork, and there is no doubt that it gives a very elaborate picture of Thakali society and culture.

But why should it be read by scholars who are not specialized in Thakali matters? Vinding does not compare his materials with that of neighboring groups (except occasionally in footnotes). But since the Thakali are closely related to the Gurung and Tamang in the east, the Magar in the west, and also to the Tiberan-speakers in the north, there are various issues which are of general interest for Himalayan studies.

First of all there is the social organization of the Thakali. Vinding describes it mainly in terms of descent groups: there are three endogamous quasi-ethnic groups, each of which consists of exogamous patrilineal clans which are linked to an ossuary. On closer reading, however, it turns out that not only descent but also locality is of great significance: for example, localized clans function as exogamous units, and some villages are organized like “city states” (p. 283). Also interesting is the strong emphasis on the household (*dhongpa*) as a social and political unit.

The second theme of greater relevance is the religious system. The Thakali have an interesting blend of traditions: mainly a pre-Buddhist layer of Tibetan folk religion (related to Bon and locally known as *dbom*), a strong element of Tibetan Buddhism (or Lamaism), and some strains of Hinduism. Especially the first, the *dbom* tradition, is a fascinating issue, as it is based on a form of shamanism which clearly links the Thakali to neighboring tribal cultures. However, as the author notes, the chapter is no more than an introduction to Thakali religion, and so it can only give a glimpse of this rich tradition.

The third issue of wider interest is the question of Thakali identity. In his chapter on history Vinding suggests that the Thakali probably descend from a “proto Tamang-Gurung-Thakali tribe” (p. 67). They speak a language linked to the ancient kingdom

of Serib (which extended further north), and have a religion which displays continuities with neighboring groups. But the present day Thakali have constituted themselves as an ethnic group only through the changing contexts of political affiliation and immigration over the centuries. Vinding denies that this development is due to the formation of the nation state (p. 389), as it started already before. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the foundation of the Nepalese monarchy has had a strong impact on the Thakali's cultural self-definition.

Vinding's book is indeed the most comprehensive study of Thakali society and identity available at present, and it surely will be a standard source for some time. But especially the account of religion remains sketchy, and so there is still ample scope for further studies.

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Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief. By GAURI VISWANATHAN.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. xx, 328 pp. \$16.95 (paper).

Gauri Viswanathan's central argument, set forth in a dense display of literary erudition, is that conversion, as a subversion of secularizing (and nationalizing) state power, is one of the most destabilizing political events in the life of any society, an event that alters social patterns and challenges notions of belief as a form of communal assent to normative standards. Conversion, from her perspective, is "an interpretive act," something "transgressive" that belongs within the domain of cultural criticism. As a departure from the "fold," it threatens social cohesion "as forcefully as if beliefs had been turned into heresies" (p. xi). As a form of resistance against enforced conformity, it attempts to impose definitions of identity upon hapless, marginalized minorities. In exposing the limits of modernity and secularity, it questions discourses over basic "rights" (whether "civil" or "political" or simply "human"). In her attempts to link "the inexhaustible scope of meanings attached to conversion" and their location "at the nexus of both spiritual and material interests" (p. xvii), Viswanathan finds that conversion has more to do with the "worldliness" of religious belief than with matters of final authority or universal verity. Ultimately, for her, belief and conversion are political events—this-worldly acts of defiance, forms of rebellion having this-worldly consequences. So seen, conversion as dissent can also be perceived as an exercise in forms of "transgressive" resistance (pp. 178, 241). This "subjective" aspect, in our day, attracts attention among those who relish postmodern forms of "discourse analysis."

Throughout her study, Viswanathan attempts to combine two parallel, interconnected, and seemingly contradictory processes—the liberation of persecuted minorities in England and the cultural domination of peoples subjected to British rule—which she sees as parts of a common larger project of secularizing (and "Anglicizing") national-cum-imperial ("colonial") consolidation. To make her case, she intersperses insightful if sometimes speculative chapters on her general theme with a separate chapter devoted to each of four specific "conversion" narratives of noteworthy individuals: John Henry Newman (to Catholicism), Pandita Ramabai (to Christianity), Annie Besant (to Theosophy), and Bimrao Ambedkar (to Buddhism). Her perception of the anomalous and contradictory relationship between a "dislocation and exile" (p. 88) of India's Christians from the Hindu identity which underpinned