

HUGH VAN SKYHAWK (ed.): *'Minorities' on themselves*. (South Asian Digest of Regional Writing, Vol. 11, 1985.) xiv, 212 pp. Heidelberg: University of Heidelberg, South Asia Institute; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, [1987], DM 44.

This book is a collection of papers from a seminar held at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, in the summer of 1985. The seminar, from which the book takes its title, had two main goals as outlined here in the preface (p. ix): (1) to study the self-images found in the literatures of those social groups in South Asia which are often described as "minorities"; (2) to consider the applicability of the term "minority" with regard to social groups in South Asia.

The eleven papers collected here mostly apply themselves to the first of these two lines of enquiry. The geographical range of subject is as wide as the diversity of approaches favoured by the various authors, and it has to be said that the collection is something of a 'mixed bag' whose commonness of purpose often disappears from view. Perhaps the most successful piece is Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam's long paper on 'Self-perception and identity of Singapore Tamilians as reflected in their writings', an inspired if somewhat overly critical study of the 'involved' pursual of literary traditions in the diaspora; many of the observations made here are germane to a much wider context. A more apologist line is taken by several of the other papers, including Hans-Werner Gensichen's piece on 'The future of Christianity in India', the editor's own study of 'The heart of religion: a Sufi's thoughts on the relations between religious communities' (a review of the thoughts of Šekh Abdul Rajhākšāh Biyānbānī), and Inayatollah Baloch's rather breathless canter through the theme of 'Resistance and national liberation in Baluchi poetry'. This reviewer is grateful to Lothar Lutze for introducing the Muslim Hindi writer Šānī, but cannot quite decide what to make of Claus-Peter Zoller's somewhat eccentric account of '*Maṇḍān* in Delhi', whose subject—a Garhwal rite performed in Chandni Chowk—offers a rich but indigestible feast of data and impressions for the political scientist, anthropologist and linguist alike.

Western and Southern India are represented in a further four articles. Parallel themes are broached by Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Eleanor Zelliot on Maharashtra's *dalit* and Buddhist literature respectively, the latter paper being a useful bibliographical survey of writings inspired primarily by Ambedkar. Robert Zydenbos includes some forceful translations in his introduction to the medieval Kannada poet Brahmaśiva. Reading Vijaya Dabbe's treatment of 'Early Vīśāivism as found in *vacana*-literature' suggests that antipathies such as those which appear between individual sects and orthodox Brahmanism may more profitably be viewed as rhetorical oppositions rather than as 'minority/majority' positions.

Pritam Singh's article on 'Consciousness of

Sikh identity', while admittedly not having any startling revelations to make, is ill-served by the editor, who allows the piece to end mid-sentence and then explains in a note that the original typescript had been destroyed by fire. Cutting the article altogether would have been a bolder resolution of the problem. A sterner editorial hand would also have cut much of the verbiage which is natural to the conference hall but redundant in published papers, and would have reduced the widespread typographical gremlins to a less prominent minority. But some latitude in editorial severity allows light relief when it lets through such a delightful image as the following from Hellman-Rajanayagam, in her discussion of Tamil literary tradition (p. 53): 'The contrast between virtue and vice is purely superficial: the "good" girl wears a sari, no make-up, reads classical literature, the "bad" girl wears trousers, make-up and speaks English. The same applies to the men'.

RUPERT SNELL