



Emmy Noether research group on Jainism in Karnataka has started its work

Funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG) enabled the establishment of a project on the history, religion, art and architecture of Digambara Jainism in Karnataka in February 2005. The project is headed by Dr. Julia A. B. Hegewald, an art historian specialising in South Asia. In May 2005, she was joined by Julia Lauer, a student assistant from the Religious Studies Department in Heidelberg, and in June by Sabine Scholz from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Leipzig.

As part of the project, Sabine Scholz is working on a PhD thesis on the Digambara form of Jainism. Key questions of her research will be concerned with the distinctiveness of Digambara Jainism in Karnataka and its relationship with other, particularly Hindu religious groups. In December 2005, Dr. Pius Pinto, a historian from Mysore University, became the fourth member of this interdisciplinary research team. He is examining historical and political changes which initially led to a sudden rise in Jaina influence in Karnataka from about the fifth century AD, and a loss of power in certain regions of the state from the early twelfth century onwards. He will also conduct research on the fifteenth-century revival of the Jaina religion in the coastal region of Karnataka.

In October 2005, the group presented their work in the form of a joint lecture at the SAI, and between January and March 2006, the team jointly carried out extensive fieldwork in Karnataka. During this time, they took part in the celebrations conducted on the occasion of the Mahamastakabhisheka of the colossal statue of Gomateshvara at Shravanabelgola, a festivity last celebrated in this form thirteen years ago. The group will be exhibiting further photographs documenting this major ritual in an exhibition at the SAI.

Planned for the winter 2006/07 is a conference in India examining the diverse and lasting contribution of Jainism to Karnataka culture. The research symposium will involve a large number of local Jaina specialists and establish further contacts between scholars in India and those based at the SAI.

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From left: Sabine Scholz, Julia Lauer, Julia Hegewald and Pius Pinto. - Photo: SAI



The Mahamastakabhisheka ceremony at Shravanabelgola. - Photo: Julia Hegewald

The Mahamastakabhisheka Ceremony

In February 2006, the Emmy-Noether-Research Group (DFG) on Jainism in Karnataka had the rare opportunity to visit the famous Jaina festival of the Mahamastakabhisheka in the Jaina pilgrimage centre of Shravanabelgola, Karnataka, a ceremony which takes place only every 12-13 years. Thousands of people from all over India gathered to celebrate the head anointing ceremony of the colossal statue of Gomateshvara. The world's tallest monolith was built around 980

A.D. by general Camundaraya. It represents Bahubali, the second son of the mythical first Tirthankara, Rshaba. Bahubali became detached from the world after having to fight his own brother and remained in total meditation in the standing posture until he attained complete and perfect knowledge.

This millenium's first Mahamastakabhisheka took place from 8-19 February 2006. Hundreds of pots of different purifying substances, such as sugarcane

juice, milk and sandal paste, were poured over the statue, bathing the image in different colours - a feast to the eyes!

Allegedly more than a million people attended the event, but security forces, volunteers and pilgrims remained relaxed, friendly and good-tempered. Who was not fortunate enough to get a place right in front of the image climbed the opposite hill, where people had picnics waiting for the ceremony to start. Musicians performed and encouraged pilgrims to dance. The whole event combined the praise of outstanding ascetic values represented by Bahubali with cheerful celebrations and showed that fasting and feasting can form a harmonious entity in the life of the Jaina people. Photographs documenting the ceremony are exhibited at the SAI from 20 June to 3 July 2006.

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Purification of the statue of Gomateshvara.

- Photo: Sabine Scholz

Traditional rituals in modern Kāñcīpuram

The small south Indian town Kāñcīpuram is a place of religious pluralism that since the 7th century C.E. has drawn together religious specialists of various faiths. The ritual traditions within this pilgrimage center are explored by the project entitled “Initiation, priestly ordination, temple festivals”, which is part of the larger SFB 619 Ritualdynamik (Collaborative Research Center on the Dynamics of Ritual ^①). It investigates the factors leading to change and those factors maintaining stability of the rituals on a textual, structural and institutional level, but also from the individual perspectives of the contemporary religious specialists at the Varadarāja Perumāl temple there.

At the center of attention are two sets of separate but interrelated rituals: initiation (dīkṣā) rituals and other modes of acquiring ritual competence for temple priests, and the yearly main temple festival (brahmotsava) during which the god leaves his temple and strides through the town, thereby transforming secular space into ritual space. The temple priests are the group studied most intensively for both sets of rituals: the god’s actions are inseparably connected with his priests who serve him and who are perceived as his representatives or even manifestations.

The project studies the texts deemed relevant by the main actors and other par-



Acquiring ritual competence: priestly education in Kāñcīpuram - Photo: Ute Hüsken

ticipants in the rituals and ethnographic field research in Kāñcīpuram. The formal qualifications for temple priests are listed in the authoritative medieval Sanskrit texts. However, although elements of these textual descriptions can be found in practice, the performance of the initiations is mainly determined by contextual factors such as daily temple politics, the status of the participants within the temple-hierarchy, and so on. Therefore the investigation also takes other aspects

of authorisation and agency of the ritual specialists into account, such as the strategies of priestly families to cope with the changed relation of state and religion in the colonial and post-colonial periods, which also changed the concept of “what a priest ought to learn and know”.

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^① www.ritualdynamik.uni-hd.de