Inaugural Volume
I - 2008/2009

Editorial: A few words about Indology and its future

by Robert Zydenbos, München

Neue Wissenschaftsfächer (wie Betriebswissenschaft u.a.) treten auf allein aus dem praktischen Bedürfnis. Sie werden enorm frequentiert, ohne daß Forscher und Lehrer vom Charakter wissenschaftlichen Geistes da sind. Andere Wissenschaften, die sachlich von größtem Gewicht sind, werden wenig bedacht, da ein praktisches Bedürfnis nicht, oder noch nicht vorliegt und nur wenige Studenten sich ihnen zuwenden (Ägyptologie, Indologie, Sinologie).

– Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität*

The German philosopher Karl Jaspers had a broad vision. When he wrote his *Die großen Philosophen,* he did not, as many Western thinkers still tend to do, limit himself to the history of philosophy in the Western world: he was interested in the *world,* in the whole of humanity and its intellectual achievements. His grasp of the history, science and philosophy of Asia, and his understanding of the future of the world, was such that he realized that the attention to Asian studies not only in Germany, but throughout the Western world, needed to be seriously reconsidered. The first edition of his *Die Idee der Universität* appeared in 1923. The changing economic, political, and demographic face of the world in the past decades seems to prove that he had a point.
The MIZ agrees with Jaspers – not only that India is important, but also that there is an intrinsic value in the academic study of culture.

Some basic ideas which we hold

In spite of more than two centuries of history, the academic study of Indian culture as carried out in the Western world is still an area with considerable deficiencies, and therefore it is one of great intellectual challenges. One obvious challenge already lies in the field of Indian languages, because language is the most important vehicle of culture. Sanskrit, the most important classical

language of South Asia, is the language that has been studied by far the most thoroughly; nevertheless, the state of Sanskrit studies in general is still modest in comparison to the amount of work that has been done in Latin or classical Greek studies. Meanwhile, the Government of India has recognized Tamil, and as of October 2008 Kannada and Telugu as well, as classical languages – languages that have been wonderful vehicles of culture for many centuries, that are among the languages of the world with the largest numbers of speakers, and about which relatively little is known outside the Indian subcontinent. The same is the case with the heritage that has been transmitted through almost two dozen other national languages of India.

This less than ideal state of affairs is largely a matter of available manpower. The number of properly qualified Indologists outside India has always been small, and the work to be done was (and still is) enormous. It is only natural that every professor invests his time and energy in a limited, specialized field, simply because there is a limit to what a single person can do; it is also natural that students are inspired by what the professor does, and therefore they continue the professor's work, in that same specialized field. Given the small number of researchers, the number of such specialized fields in Indological studies in which research and teaching take place necessarily has remained small as well. Exchanges with experts in India have been relatively few, because the Indian colleagues often are not aware of the various academic difficulties on the Western side.

The MIZ wants to create an awareness of the wonderful diversity and richness of Indian culture, the academic study of which is Indology.

Specialization is natural and unavoidable: the alternative, for the researcher, is to be a jack of all trades, knowing a little bit about everything and not really much about anything in particular. Nobody stops to wonder why there is no such thing as a 'Europologist': a person who is equally fluent in (for instance) Spanish, Finnish, Russian, Dutch, and Irish, besides also knowing everything about German, French, and English language and literature, and about Latin and ancient Greek too, and who on the spur of the moment can explain the historical significance of Dante and why the Doukhobors emigrated to Canada. Yet this is precisely the sort of thing that people – the general public, but also politicians, and university administrators – seem to expect from Indologists. And let us not forget that India is culturally more diverse than the whole of Europe combined.

We also believe that it is not necessary to write about these interesting matters

in a style of language that is only understandable for a small number of specialists. It is possible to write in a manner that is accessible to intelligent readers who are not specialists, and yet to remain serious; seriousness does not lie in an obscure, pretentious and esoteric terminology.

Those who have spent any meaningful amount of time in India know that there is only one language through which one can communicate throughout the whole of the country: English. But if one is even just slightly sensitive and self-critical, one realizes that without further, specifically Indian language skills, one merely scratches the surface and can hardly gain an adequate cultural understanding or enter into serious cultural dialogue. 'Indian culture' is just as abstract as 'European culture', and needs the direct specificness of the so-called 'regional' cultures to show what it concretely means in people's lives. The MIZ, therefore, will pay attention to those 'regional' cultures of India.

The significance of Sanskrit

There is a persistent notion throughout the world that Sanskrit is a dead language (and, curiously enough, many Indologists lend support to this notion). It is not. Across South Asia, there are thousands of learned persons who are capable of expressing themselves orally and in writing in the classical language, much like learned Europeans could express themselves in Latin as recently as one and a half centuries ago. The MIZ aims at gathering not only an international readership, but also such an authorship, reducing linguistic barriers to the best of the editors' abilities; hence we also gladly welcome contributions in Sanskrit, hoping that this will improve the exchange of thoughts between (mainly, but not necessarily only) traditionally trained scholars in India and those who appreciate the classical language as a living medium of communication. Contributions that are offered to the MIZ in Sanskrit will be evaluated by the editors according to the same criteria as for contributions in other languages.

To illustrate this, the present issue contains an interview in Sanskrit with *vidyāvācaspati* Bannanje Govindacharya, taken by one of the editors in Udupi in October 2007. Govindacharya is one of the leading authorities on the Vaiṣṇava religious and philosophical tradition of Madhvācārya, which is commonly known as Dvaitavedānta. He produced an edition of the collected writings of Madhva based on the oldest existing manuscript, and he is known and is highly appreciated by the general public throughout South India and

beyond as a gifted orator. In the interview he speaks about his odd experiences with religious orthodoxy while publishing the works of Madhva, and about his own recent writing in Sanskrit.

As an example of contemporary writing in Sanskrit, we are including a very short excerpt from Govindacharya's recent, highly scholarly edition of the *Madhvavijaya,* the hagiographic account of Madhva's life by Nārāyaṇapaṇḍitācārya. We invite further short statements in Sanskrit for our section *Iti mama matam.*

Bologna

A journal such as the MIZ naturally watches current developments in Europe with concern. The current reform of university education across the European Union (the so-called *Bologna Process*) is a catastrophe for the diversity and richness of Europe's academic landscape. As carried out in Germany, it is an example of the cultural destructiveness of misunderstood 'globalization': the adoption of a supposedly American model of higher education, complete with surrogate B.A. and M.A. degrees, without the advantages and flexibility of the underlying American infrastructure and the student's freedom to combine subjects in an individually creative and meaningful way. It is the result of a drive towards homogenization and massification, in which the so-called 'small subjects' are gradually declared socially irrelevant not because of a lack of intrinsic cultural, social, or other intellectual value, but because they do not fit an irrelevant, quasi-rational pattern of curricula or do not draw large numbers of students; they finally risk being declared 'not sustainable' and being scrapped. University administrators and politicians can then pride themselves on saving a few thousand euros at the cost of destroying academic traditions that have been built up over generations. As things stand at present, 'Bologna' apparently wants to produce mediocrity, and cannot produce anything better. One wonders whether the Bologna Process indicates that the European Union is forfeiting its ambitions in the humanities and is definitely passing on the torch of leadership in this field in the Western world to North America.

The MIZ, perhaps needless to say, can also be seen as an effort at countering this tendency towards academic dehumanization. We hope to offer knowledgeable authors on Indian subjects a platform on which they can present work that runs counter to the trend of massification and superficialization.

Contents of this issue

The MIZ has various sections. The **photo essay section** contains an item about the largest Indian temple ritual, the Jaina *Mahāmastakābhiṣeka,* which is performed once every twelve years in different places in the south Indian state of Karnataka. The essay provides images from Śravaṇabeḷagoḷa, the oldest and best-known site of the ritual; in the next issue, we hope to bring a similar item about the youngest such site, Dharmasthala. In the **interview section** we bring interviews with interesting personalities in the fields of Indian culture and its study: this time, it is an interview with Bannanje Govindacharya, one of south India's leading Sanskrit scholars, editor of the collected writings of the thirteenth-century philosopher and religious thinker Madhvācārya, and prolific author. The **article section** begins with an article of particular historical interest for our journal, namely, about the history of Indological studies in Munich, by a former member of what at the time was called the Institut für Indologie und Iranistik (now the Institute of Indology and Tibetology), Prof. Dr. Friedrich Wilhelm. This is followed by a report by Claudia Weber about her work in progress on the Paraśurāma-Kalpasūtra. An article by Sigmund Oehrl transcends the conventional geographical boundaries of Indology and discusses a supposed historical connection between the Indian deity Sūrya, the Teutonic Tyr and the Celtic Nuadu.

Returning to India, the section **the Unknown Deity** fulfils one of the programmatic goals of the journal. The fabulous diversity of Indian culture expresses itself also in its wide variety of religious practices and beliefs, most of which is unknown to non-Indians and Indians alike. Gregory Alles is professor of religious studies at McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland, USA, has taught at the Institute of Religious Studies of the University of Munich as a visiting professor on several occasions, and in his contribution to this issue he introduces a tribal deity from Gujarat, Pithoro, to give an impression of his research in that part of India. Similarly, the section **Literary Glances and Gleanings** familiarizes the readers with lesser-known aspects of the diversity of India's literary wealth. This time, the contributions are by members of the Munich Institute of Indology and Tibetology: Mrs. Dr. habil. Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam introduces a poem from classical Tamil, and Mr. J. Knüppel, M.A. a poem by the famous Telugu poet and composer Tyāgarāja.

The **review section** contains discussions of a variety of recent publications of

Indological interest. One is about a short but interesting study that corrects a common misunderstanding about an aspect of Dvaitavedānta. Other reviewed publications include a new German translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* with modern commentary that has appeared in the new Verlag der Weltreligionen, a pictorial art historical survey of the various states of India, an anthropological study of a village in Tamilnadu, and two modern novels by Shobha De and Alka Saraogi which have appeared in German translation. In the section **The Museum Exhibit** an item from the South Asia collection of the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich is presented.

We hope that our readers will appreciate the efforts of all who have contributed to this issue. We also hope that the MIZ will not only help inform its readers about the richness and value of Indian culture, but will also impress upon the readers that just as India, with its marvellous past, is moving towards a magnificent future, also Indology, as Karl Jaspers wrote, deserves a good deal more attention.