Heritage politics at the Pashupatinatha Temple in Kathmandu, Nepal

Axel Michaels
(Professor of Classical Indology, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University)

Abstract

Since the seventh century or earlier Pashupati, a form of Shiva, has been addressed as a tutelary deity by the Nepalese Licchavi, Malla and Shaha kings. His popular temple, about 3 km west of Kathmandu, is a national monument and symbol. The temple surrounded by numerous other religious and profane buildings has changed markedly over the past few decades, i.e. during a period when Nepal also changed politically, socially, and economically. The very question of Nepaliness parallels the debates on the Pashupatinatha temple: What is the (religious) centre of Nepal? With whom one is to identify? Are federalism and democracy, decentralization and local autonomous forms of governance the best answer to Nepal’s religious and social diversity? Or are centralized and unitary models of governance to be favoured? In a more general sense these questions concern notions of hybridity and the socio-religious imaginaries that are generated through modernization processes, especially through the rise of public spheres and their new media as well as through propaganda for democratic, nationalist and socialist ideals. The paper discusses especially the influence of the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) in restructuring the site into an ‘Indian’ tourist and pilgrim’s place.

Further reading:
Curriculum Vitae

since 2007 Co-Director of the Excellence Cluster „Asia and Europe in a Global Context“
since 2002 Speaker of the Collaborative Research Centre “The Dynamics of Ritual”
since 1998 Professor of Classical Indology, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg
1992 Professor of Religious Studies, University of Berne
1986 Visiting Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford; Ademischer Rat, Dept. of Indology, University of Kiel
1991 Habilitation
1983–1991 Assistant Professor, Dept. of Indology, University of Kiel
1981–1983 Director of the Nepal Research Centre and the Nepal-German Preservation Projects in Kathmandu
1971–1981 Benares Hindu University: Post-graduate Course in Indian Religion and Philosophy; Researcher at the Hamburgische Völkerkundemuesum; Assistant Professor at the Universities of Muenster and Kiel
1968–1971 Studies of Law, Sociology and Philosophy, University of Munich and Freiburg

Honours
Full Member of the Heidelberger Academy of Sciences (since 2006); State Teaching Award Baden-Württemberg (2005); Heisenberg Fellowship (1990); Spalding Visiting Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford (1986)

Fields of Interest
Ethno-Indology; Social and Legal History of Hinduism; Cultural History of Nepal; Ritual studies

Current Research Projects
“Lyfe-cycle rituals in Nepal” (within DFG-SFB 619, 2002–2012); „Religion on stage“
(with Excellence Cluster Asia and Europe in a Global Context

Book Publications (selection)

Edited books (selection)