The Madhva Gaureshvar Sampradaya in Orissa - Institutions, Texts and Practices of a Hindu Religious Tradition in its regional context

Summary / Zusammenfassung

The project studies the dissemination and organization of the Madhva Gaureshvara Sampradaya, a Hindu religious community following the devotional (bhakti) teachings of its founder Caitanya (1486-1533), in the Indian regional state of Orissa. In focussing on Orissa, the project deals with the community on a rarely studied „middle“ level of dissemination, that is on a level between local and pan-Indian or even globalized forms of Hinduism. Thus, the religious community is considered not only in a specific locality or with regard to one sacred center, but on a regional level. Although the regional state of Orissa provides the point of departure for this endeavour, the study is not confined to a purely territorial understanding of a region. Rather, one is confronted with pan-Indian and even global presences of the sampradaya and thus with networks, pilgrimage routes etc. which go well beyond territorial boundaries. One aim of the project is to explore the constructions of the region in terms of the sacred topography that is created by the members of the religious community in its literature or by establishing sacred sites and mathas.

Another central interest of the project is a study of organizational structures and networks: This is done on the basis of a comprehensive documentation of the monastic institutions. A characteristic feature of the Caitanya tradition is its decentralized form of organization and representation. There is no single sacred center or a head monastery. However, the monasteries are connected to each other by the spiritual lineage they belong to. Lineage here means an uninterrupted teacher-disciple genealogy, a guruparampara. In Orissa, the 158 mathas I have documented are distributed in 9 different lineages. The project combines the methods of textual analysis with field research in the monastic institutions. Moreover, some of the analytical concepts used in the anthropology and sociology of religion prove to be helpful. Thus, on the one hand the project includes the study of the canonical literature, which means mainly Puranas and theological treatises and commentaries in Sanskrit and hagiographical literature in Bengali and Oriya. The analysis of the texts is focussed on theological issues and on the depiction of the religious practice. Of special interest are hagiographies as they often embed the religious doctrine in specific social contexts and it is a genre which is flourishing even nowadays. On the other hand, I conduct interviews with the resident monks and nuns and document and analyze rituals and festivals.

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Publications / Publikationen
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