

UWE KÖCKMANN: *Hindutradition und Stadtentwicklung. Varanasi: Analyse einer gewachsenen ungeplanten Pilgerstadt am Ganges.* Bochum: Studienverlag Dr.N.Brockmeyer, 1982. 115 pages, DM 24.80.

This case-study, a diploma thesis, is based on socio-geographical field-work undertaken by the author in 1972. His fascination for the subject-matter and field-work motivated him to continue research in 1974/75 and 1976. His Ph.D. thesis on "The Political History of Varanasi" (Universität Bochum, 1978, 362 pages) has, however, not yet been published.

I think that all "Banarsi-Wallahs" will welcome this little book under review since it gives detailed answers to many of the questions that we ask ourselves each time we return to this 'holy place', fascinated and bewildered at the same time. Here in this book we now have the 'facts and figures' about the impact that religion had and indeed still has on the city, that is to say, on its traffic, its population structure, its economic situation and its architecture. And we have, moreover, a very helpful example of German professional training: a neat sketch of the Dasaswamedh- and the Vishwanath Lane, from Goudolia Crossing to the Ghats and up to Vishwanath Mandir. One can even make out the little shop where one bought the bamboo-basket last year, and on looking more closely one finds the familiar brass-shop accurately placed between "Toys" and "Bangles". Unfortunately, we do not learn the nature of the comments that the Dukhan-Wallahs are sure to have made about that "funny German student" who was trying to reduce their Hindu way of life to mere numbers and symbols. Or did Uwe Köckmann do his surveys in the early hours of the morning when only a few lonely cows and dogs were strolling through the area?

How did the Western scholar react to these surroundings? As the subtitle already indicates, Varanasi appears to him to be a city which is characterized by its absence of planning and in which more than 25 % of the population lives under "unsatisfactory conditions. It would be necessary to pull down many of the dilapidated houses and replace them by quarters which were better planned. This, however, is impossible due to the high costs involved in acquiring the desired holy soil in the town centre" (p.104). His English summary ends with the statement: "Generally, it can be said, that the traditional holiness of Varanasi has resisted modern tendencies till now or as Spate puts it: 'The streets are crowded with priests, mendicants, and touts, and their pilgrim prey; and through the turmoil the sacred bulls of Siva lounge arrogantly. In Christian countries the odour of excessive sanctity has not infrequently a commercial taint, but in Benares it is all-pervading.'"

Detlef Kantowsky