

from Kunduz relies in particular on the shifts in thinking and decision-making over an extended biographical period in the lives of the respondents.

*Trading Worlds* is a book that caters to many different audiences at the same time. It presents an interesting and important read for geographers and cultural anthropologists alike, while also being important for Afghan historiography, for borderland studies, and for studies on global and regional trade in general.

Stefan Schütte

LENA ZÜHLKE, *Verehrung und Verschmutzung des Ganges. Zusammenhang der ökologischen Probleme und der religiösen Bedeutung des heiligen Flusses*. Berlin: regiospectra Verlag, 2013. 480 pages, €32.90. ISBN 978-3-940132-50-5

The heavy pollution affecting so many rivers is doubtless one of the greatest socio-ecological challenges of India, taking on tremendous significance in the case of the Ganges, the holiest river of India and a lifeline for the north of the country. The decades-long debate on the pollution of the Ganges and its tributaries illustrates the many contradictions that underlie the cultural-religious, socio-ecological and also political-economical transformation processes of the largest democracy in the world. River clean-up programmes in India are characterised by a multitude of actors, unclear and fragmented spheres of competence and responsibility, as well as (practically) ubiquitous corruption and nepotism. The Ganga Action Plan (GAP), begun in 1986 under Rajiv Gandhi, is no exception to this rule; on the contrary, to many environmentalists and observers, it has become a symbol of the continuing failure of governmental – and partly also non-governmental – environmental protection initiatives.

A visit to the holy ghats along the banks of the river reveals these contradictions even to the casual observer and raises the unavoidable question: Why do devout Hindus continue to observe their daily ritual bathing in the Ganges, when they (must) know that its heavy pollution is harmful to their health? Why, after their prayers, do they throw not only garlands of flowers but also plastic bags into the river?

Lena Zühlke's book, *Veneration and Pollution of the Ganges. The Interrelation between the Ecological Problems and Religious Significance of the Holy River*, focuses in this context on the (apparent) contradiction between the (cultural-)religious significance of the Ganges and the socio-ecological problems of its pollution. She takes as her starting point the fact that believers distinguish between the ecological contamination of the Ganges and the religious cleansing power of the goddess Ganga, although these seem to be inextricably linked. This separation has led, in the author's view, to an "equalising of the ecological problems" ("Vergleichsgültigung der ökologischen Probleme", p. 21) from a reli-

gious perspective. Zühlke thus dedicates her central research question to determining “how the complex interplay between the ecological problems of the Ganges and its religious significance are reflected in the public awareness of Hindu society” (p. 27).

The empirical research is based on 26 semi-structured, guided, qualitative interviews with selected experts (newspaper journalists, representatives from NGOs, ritual experts, priests, professors from Banaras Hindu University, officials from the water and environmental protection agencies) in the holy city of Varanasi (also known as Benares or Kashi). In light of the central research question, the focus on expert interviews seems rather unfortunate and indeed a questionable choice, given that the analysis is based on the experts’ interpretation of public awareness, but the direct user groups, such as fishers or launderers, are not interviewed on an equal basis, but rather are quoted here and there throughout the book.

Following the introduction, which outlines the methods of the research, the second chapter offers a comprehensive presentation of the mythological and religious significance of the Ganges, as well as of its ecological problems and their causes. The detailed description demonstrates meticulous work and provides an up-to-date and comprehensive picture of the interconnections involved. The many details, and in particular the frequent repetitions, render the chapter a difficult read at times. The subsequent analysis of the interviews from the individual expert groups underscores the complicated interrelationships between the ecological problems and the religious veneration of the Ganges from their relative perspectives. Dividing the analysis among the different expert groups inevitably produces redundancies, which nonetheless seem both intentional and justifiable.

In the section that follows, the author manages to combine the various perspectives in an illuminating discussion. In particular, the central contradiction between the seemingly unthinking treatment of the river and its veneration is traced back to the dual understanding of “religiously pure” and “ecologically pure”. In keeping with earlier English-language works on the Ganges (Kelly D. Alley: *On the Banks of the Ganga. When Wastewater Meets a Sacred River*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002) and the Yamuna (David L. Haberman: *River of Love in an Age of Pollution. The Yamuna River of Northern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), the author emphasises the division between the river and its divinity as “a reaction to the unmistakable pollution” and justifies it by saying that the believers thus wish to protect the goddess Ganga (p. 357) while at the same time maintaining their own need for the remission of sins. According to the popular belief, the goddess Ganga cannot be harmed by pollution, otherwise she would lose her almighty power.

In this context, Lena Zühlke stresses the vital role of the priests, who – with their interpretation of pollution and its associated effects on the population – shape public awareness. At the same time, however, the priests find them-

selves in an “ambivalent situation”, since a greater awareness of the ecological contamination could lead believers to doubt the goddess Ganga, thereby weakening the role of the priests (pp. 365–66). Despite these risks, all of those interviewed considered the overcoming of the separation between the religious and ecological dimension – along with the fight against corruption – to be the key to successful environmental protection measures.

Of particular interest are Lena Zühlke’s critical comments on the role of the daily press, which provides only superficial reporting with a strong religious bias, as well as her critical view of the role of local NGOs, which in her opinion, with few exceptions, are poorly networked, merely criticising the measures taken by the GAP and making demands out of proportion to their influence (p. 375). The author convincingly emphasises the fact that the “actual causes of the pollution” from industry as well as the failure of governmental agencies (p. 426) are often pushed into the background of public discussion, “drowned out” (p. 427) by the stronger focus on pollution from religious practices. Overall, the book persuades the interested reader – despite the occasional lengthy passage – through its differentiated consideration of the interrelationships analysed.

*Alexander Follmann*

GREGOR HAIN, *Die Sicherheit und Stabilität Indiens. Historische, politische und wirtschaftliche Herausforderungen.* (Moderne Südasiestudien – Gesellschaft, Politik, Wirtschaft, 2). Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2015. 534 pages, €98.00. ISBN 978-3-8487-1754-5

The stability of India’s democracy for more than 60 years has become the subject of a lively academic debate. Gregor Hain raises the question of the extent to which India can still be regarded as “stable and secure” (p. 27) given the enormous political and economic challenges that the country is facing. The author uses an extended concept of security and a comprehensive framework of analysis. His main interest is directed towards three areas: The first is India’s historical development, the second is the role of religion – especially the relationship between Hinduism and Islam – and the last is the persistence and impact of social revolutionary movements (pp. 28–30). In his theoretical approach, Hain emphasises theories of international relations but also points out the shortcomings of applying Western theories to non-Western societies (pp. 32ff).

The book is structured in five chapters. After the introduction, the author gives a detailed analysis of the concepts of “security” and “terrorism” (p. 51). The third chapter deals with Indian history until independence in 1947. The following chapter outlines the development of Hinduism and Islam and their impact on India’s society. Chapter five on “India’s Security and Stability” includes the main empirical data and deals with religious conflicts and their