

In Memoriam Detlef Kantowsky (1936 – 2018)

After launching the *Internationales Asienforum* in 1970 – together with the publisher Alois Graf von Waldburg-Zeil – Detlev Kantowsky regarded this project as a rather risky venture. He probably could not have dared imagine that this journal would still exist today, albeit in a somewhat different form.

That this is so, is in no small measure thanks to Detlev Kantowsky. With his own unique discipline and precision, loyalty and reliability he devoted himself for almost 40 years to this journal. “You have to dabble around, put out your feelers here and there to keep the Asienforum alive”, he once said and he took this as a criterion for his own endeavours. He addressed potential authors directly, publicised the journal at conferences, initiated specific themes and he himself contributed with many of his articles to the success of the *Internationales Asienforum*. With his article “Gandhi und Indiens Entwicklung heute” he was a contributor right from the first issue (1970). There followed regular contributions that reflected Detlev Kantowsky’s many and varied intellectual interests; not to forget numerous reviews and conference reports.

Detlev Kantowsky’s interest in India dates back to the 1960s. He learned Hindi first of all in Heidelberg, and from autumn 1964 at the Benares Hindu University. Only a year later he moved with his wife Ingrid to “his” village near Benares, the place to which he was to return again and again in the years to come. His detailed research on village development and village democracy in India, exemplified by three villages in eastern Uttar Pradesh, culminated in a work with which he qualified as Dr. habil. at the University of Konstanz and which was published in 1970. He published studies of Indian village life – still the centre of everyday life for the majority of the Indian population – in numerous articles which appeared as a compilation in the Edition Suhrkamp in 1972. He recorded his more personal experiences and encounters with village life and the villagers in his book *Bilder und Briefe aus einem indischen Dorf. Rameshvar 1965–1985* (Frankfurt 1986, English ed. 1995). It is testimony to his great empathy for and understanding of the villagers and their joys and sufferings but it also reveals the critical gaze of the sociologist who, participant observer as he was, never reduced people to mere research objects and always reflected on his own role as stranger and foreigner.

Detlev Kantowsky’s studies are relatively short, addressing only essentials. He was a great master of the pithy and apposite expression. Verbosity was quite foreign to him. When he felt the written word was inadequate he often supplemented it with black and white photographs that verged on the artistic.

This combination is particularly impressive in the large volumes on Gandhi (*Gewaltfrei leben*, 1992; *Wahrhaft sein*, 1995) and *Gotama Buddha* (1996, together with E. Saß).

Detlev Kantowsky always took a critical stance towards official development policy. Right from the first issue of the *Asienforum* he adopted his own specific attitude towards the so-called “sociology of developing countries”, and this he did with occasionally polemical remarks. As contributor to a comparative evaluation for the Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit (BMZ; Ministry for Economic Cooperation) he first became acquainted with the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka in the mid-1970s, a movement based on Gandhian and Buddhist concepts. He had already become familiar with Gandhi a few years previously, now Buddhist teachings made their impact. These motivated him to write his study on Sarvodaya and to become involved with alternative development programmes that consciously distanced themselves from a simple Western development paradigm. He himself characterized Sarvodaya as an autochthonous form of “inner-worldly asceticism”. He gave his monograph the title *Sarvodaya – The Other Development* (New Delhi 1980; Hindi edition 1984). Here are the roots of his increasing interest in Buddhism and Max Weber’s socio-religious studies on Hinduism and Buddhism that captivated him from 1980 onwards. Detlev Kantowsky’s main object was to draw attention to the misinterpretation of Weber’s study in South Asia. It was then that he began to absorb himself ever more with the Buddhist way of life and interpretation of existence and, from 1990 onwards, to edit at the University of Konstanz the series “Buddhistischer Modernismus” (Buddhist Modernism) in which his *Buddhisten in Indien heute* (2003, English ed. 2003) also appeared. Six years previously he had published *Buddhismus. Lehrer, Lehre, Weg und Weggemeinschaft*. His critical attitude towards the Western development model found programmatic expression in the collection of essays *Von Südasien lernen. Erfahrungen in Indien und Sri Lanka* (Frankfurt 1985; enlarged ed. Konstanz 1992). Here he quite consciously redirected the focus from the hitherto customary West to East (*Von Europa lernen*, Dieter Senghaas) to East to West. These articles can be read as the fulfilment of the motto that Detlev Kantowsky had prefixed to the first issue of *Asienforum* in the year 1970: “[...] the contributions are addressed to a public aware of the fact that Europe and Asia are becoming increasingly interdependent”. This perception has lost nothing of its pertinence – it is still valid for the journal.

As Professor, Detlev Kantowsky taught Sociology and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Konstanz after 1969. At the beginning of 1999 he opted for early retirement, one of the reasons probably being that he had distanced himself inwardly from everyday academic life. Since then he worked on themes such as migration of Indian workers to Mauritius, the history of Mauritian sugar production and – of great personal significance to him – the

Japanese tea culture and its reception in German speaking countries. It is no coincidence that his last publication in the *Asienforum* was entitled “Der Teekult in Japan. Eine Erinnerung an das grundlegende Werk von Anna Berliner” (2009, No.1–2), followed by a brief commentary on the then planned auction of the few personal belongings of Mahatma Gandhi. These rounded off his contributions which had started with Gandhi in the first issue and ended with Gandhi in the last one under his editorship. A full circle!

He enjoyed sharing the practice of the Japanese tea ceremony with his wife Ingrid in their house in Bodman on Lake Constance. Her sudden unexpected death at Christmas 2013 came as a terrible blow to him. He died four years later on 29 January 2018. The editors and all old and new members of the advisory board and editorial staff feel profoundly indebted to Detlev Kantowsky for his unflagging commitment over four decades. Without him the *Internationales Asienforum / International Quarterly for Asian Studies* would never have become what it is today, an illustrious international journal on Asia, one which addresses and analyses the ever changing questions and problems posed by the world today.

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