Orbituary
Pandit Dr Parameswara Aithal
18 January 1934 – 3 January 2020

Pandit Dr. Parameswara Aithal came to the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg on the recommendation of the London Indologist and legal historian J. Duncan M. Derrett. Already in 1968, my predecessors Günter-Dietz Sontheimer (1933-1992) and Hermann Berger (1926 - 2005) approached him at a conference in Madras. Two years later he arrived in Heidelberg with his wife, where he remained until his death, although after his retirement he stayed in India for many months every year until the end.

He was born in Kota (Karnataka) in a traditional family of priests and Sanskrit scholars. There he also received a traditional training as a pandit and as a Vedic priest, which included memorizing many texts, especially the Śrāuta, Gṛhya and Dharmaśāstra literatures, but also the practise of Śrāuta and Gṛhya rituals. For further education he attended the Vani Vilasini Sanskrit School in Saligrama not far from his home for five years, and Maharaja’s Sanskrit College in Mysore, where he graduated with the highest honours in 1957. In 1961 he received his BA at the A.P. College of Arts and Commerce in Bangalore, in 1965 his MA at Karnataka University, Dharwad, and in 1970 his Ph.D. at the same university with the thesis "Non-Rigvedic citations in the Aśvalāyana Śrāutasūtra" (published Varanasi 1986). During his studies he worked as a pandit and curator of the manuscript collection at the renowned Adyar Library and Research Centre in Madras until he moved to Heidelberg.

A detailed list of his writings can be found here ([https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/abt/IND/mitarbeiter/aithal/aithal.php?publikation](https://www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/abt/IND/mitarbeiter/aithal/aithal.php?publikation)) and in the volume *The Pandit - Traditional Scholarship in India* (Delhi: Manohar, 2001), edited in his honour, which appeared after a Heidelberg conference and contains contributions by Ashok Aklujkar, Johannes Bronkhorst, Madhav Deshpande, Harry Falk, Monika Horstmann, Christopher Z. Minkowski, and Albrecht Wezler.

Everybody who experienced Pt. Aithal was deeply impressed by his broad encyclopaedic knowledge and his high intelligence. He knew how to recite many texts, including the local encyclopaedias, by heart. His traditional understanding of Sanskrit grammar was reflected in numerous popular courses, which he held soon after his arrival in Heidelberg. His students virtually adored him, as he proved to be a teacher who was tirelessly there for them. Unforgettable was his great modesty, his human warmth and his unobtrusive humour.

Pt. Aithal's move from a village in India to Heidelberg was inimitably captured by Herrmann Berger: „It must have been an unexpected and exciting change for him to leave India and the idyllic atmosphere of his home in Karnataka, the Ashram where he spoke Sanskrit as the language of everyday life, and his training as a Śrauta priest. However, in a remarkably short period of time he and his family became true Heidelbergers and he was able to teach his students in excellent German. He fully accepted the Western approach to philology, at the same time remaining faithful to panditship and Indian thinking“ (Foreword in the above mentioned volume).

In fact, Dr. Aithal has never forgotten or denied his Indian origins throughout his life. How fitting, then, are words on the obituary in the Rhein-Neckar Zeitung: “He lived in several worlds, now he is gone from this world.”

Pt. Aithal leaves behind his lovely wife Yashoda, three children and three grandchildren, all of whom have settled in Heidelberg or other places in Germany.

With the death of Pandit Aithal, the South Asia Institute loses its only honorary member so far, a highly esteemed, sincere colleague, a great Sanskrit scholar of the old (Indian) school and a true philanthropist. It will honour his memory.