



Press Release

Tübingen University hosts guest lecturer from southern India

Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies expands its focus on Malayalam language and culture

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Starting in October, students at the University of Tübingen will have outstanding opportunities to learn Malayalam, a language spoken in southwestern India, thanks to a new guest professorship at the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies sponsored by the Indian government's University Grants Commission. Teachers from the Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University in the state of Kerala will be in Tübingen to support the teaching of Malayalam, which is spoken by some 33 million people. This initiative reinforces the University of Tübingen's long-term focus on the language, which is unique in Europe.

The guest professorship is known as the Gundert Chair after the Malayalam expert Hermann Gundert, a nineteenth-century academic from Tübingen who bequeathed his personal collection to the Tübingen University Library. The guest lecturers will help to work through these historical monographs and manuscripts. As part of the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies' focus on southern India – which Ethnology Professor Gabriele Alex and Indology specialist Dr. Heike Oberlin are currently expanding – the guest lecturers will play an important role in research and teaching. The partner university in Kerala is keen to promote Malayalam literature, and to make it accessible to a wider public via professional translations. A further aim is to develop teaching materials for foreign students of Malayalam.

Hermann Gundert was the grandfather of 20th century novelist Hermann Hesse and is considered one of Germany's greatest linguists in the field of South Indian languages. Gundert studied Theology in Tübingen and learned Sanskrit. He completed his doctorate in Tübingen in 1835. From 1838, he worked for the Basel Mission in Nettur in southwestern India, where Malayalam is spoken. There he

founded a school, translated from Malayalam into German, and translated the New Testament into Malayalam. He left India in 1859 due to illness. His most important works in Malayalam were therefore completed in the southwestern German town of Calw, and include the hymn book and his Malayalam-English dictionary, which remains in print today.

Gundert has been called “the Luther of Kerala.” His translation of the Bible is still used there. His dictionary and grammar remain standard works. His legacy to the Tübingen University Library contains unique material for linguists and indologists. The University of Tübingen is known as Gundert’s University in Kerala - one more reason for the Malayalam University to enter into a partnership with Tübingen on the occasion of Gundert’s 200th birthday.

The University of Tübingen has been one of Germany’s main centers of India studies since the mid-19th century, based on the work of Rudolf von Roth, who contributed to the new Veda research, and for whom Tübingen established a Chair of Sanskrit in 1856. Tübingen also sent a number of missionaries to India in the 19th century; their pastoral and academic work strengthened ties between Tübingen and Kerala.

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Hermann Gundert, 1859

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Further information at: <http://www.gundert.org>