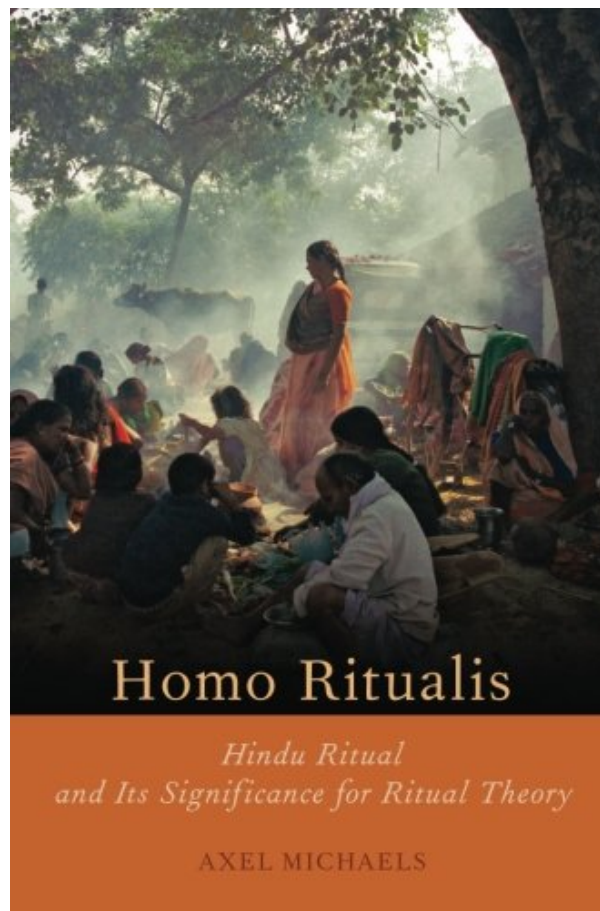
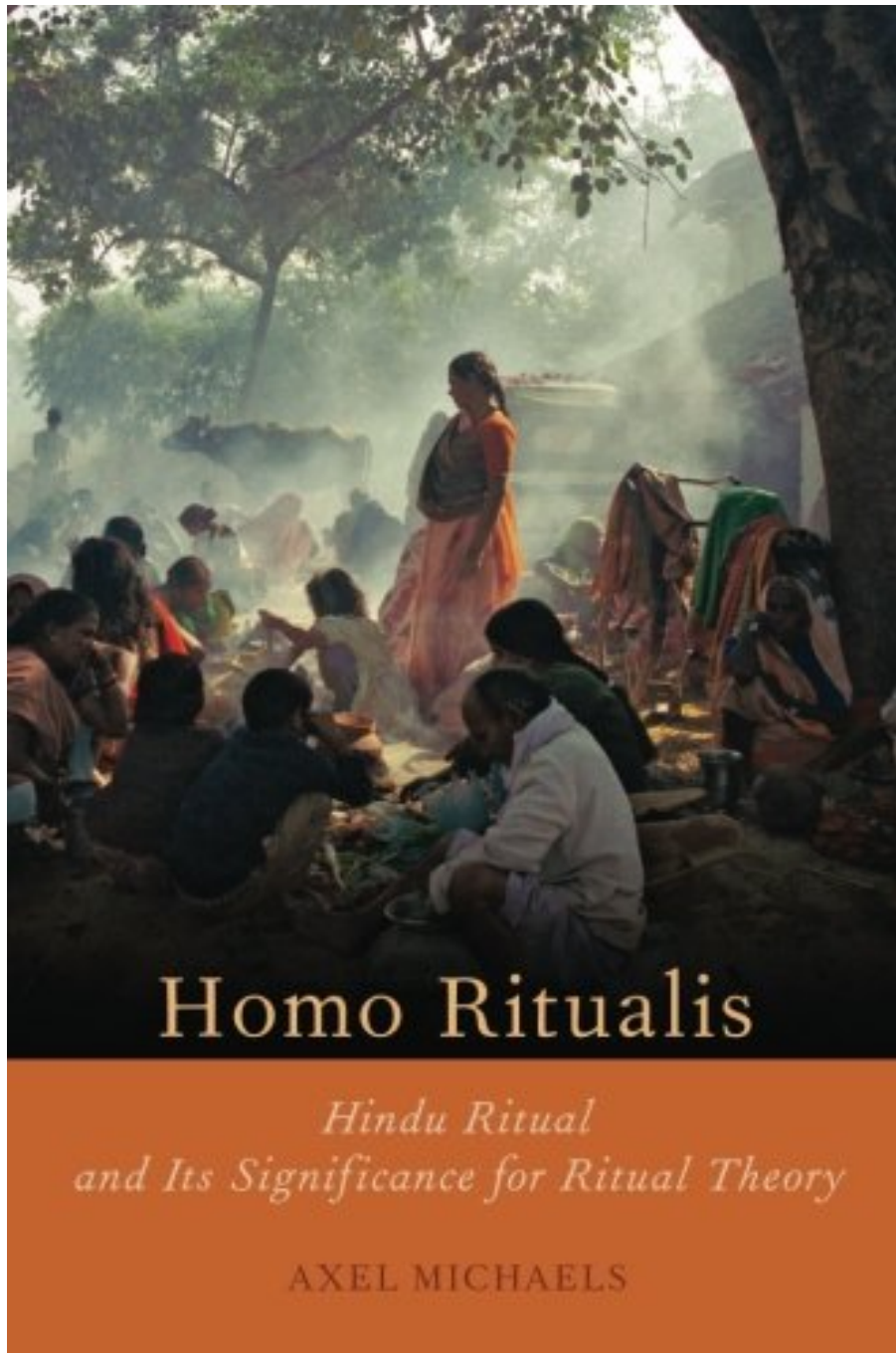


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Review

"It has been evident at least since the time of Marcel Mauss that the study of ritual ought to draw more than it does on the rich indigenous tradition of ritual theory produced within Hinduism. Until now few have possessed the necessary skills to bring these fields together. Axel Michaels is a Sanskritist, a founder of the field of ethno-Indology, and the leader of a major research program within ritual studies. He is therefore ideally placed to be the confluence where Indology, South Asian ethnography, and ritual studies flow together and produce an important new synthesis. Homo Ritualis will be an essential point of reference for all three fields." --David N. Gellner, Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford

About the Author

Axel Michaels is a scholar of Indology and religious studies. Since 1996, he has been Professor of Classical Indology at the South Asia Institute at the University of Heidelberg.

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Is the richness and diversity of rituals and celebrations in South Asia unique? Are Indians or Hindus more involved in rituals than people of other faiths and other places? If so, what makes them special? Can we speak of a homo ritualis when it comes to India or Hinduism?

Drawing on extensive textual studies and fieldwork in Nepal and India, Axel Michaels demonstrates how the characteristic structure of Hindu rituals employs the Brahmanic-Sanskritic sacrifice as a model, and how this structure is one of the distinguishing features of Hinduism more generally. Many religions tend over time to develop less ritualized or more open forms of belief, but Brahmanical Hinduism has internalized ritual behavior to the extent that it has become its most important and distinctive feature, permeating social and personal life alike. The religion can thus be seen as a particular case in the history of religions in which ritual form dominates belief and develops a sweeping autonomy of ritual behavior.

Homo Ritualis analyzes ritual through these cultural-specific and religious contexts, taking into account how indigenous terms and theories affect and contribute to current ritual theory. It describes and investigates various forms of Hindu rituals and festivals, such as life-cycle rituals, the Vedic sacrifice, vows processions, and the worship of deities (puja). It also examines various conceptual components of (Hindu) rituals such as framing, formality, modality, and theories of meaning.

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