



# The Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies

Trustees Report for the period ended December 2004

## Trustees

Dr Kenneth Valpey, Mrs Amanda Mills-Wahlstrom MSt and Mr Shaunaka Rishi Das have continued to serve as trustees in 2004.

The Trustees have requested Mrs Sharmila Bhattacharya-Ford, Mrs Neerja Sethi, Prof Keith Ward, Prof Richard Gombrich, Peggy Morgan and Mr Shaunaka Rishi Das to continue acting as members of the OCHS Board of Governors.

## Overview of 2004

The process of developing and promoting the field of Hindu Studies has gone from strength to strength in the last year. The Centre has continued to develop its core academic programmes and projects, accepting new students, new visiting scholars, arranging lectures, seminars and tutorials. The presence of Prof. Narayanan, lecturing and giving seminars at the Centre, did much to develop fruitful links with the University of Florida.

The Appointments Committee, including official representatives from the Theology and Oriental Studies faculties, has offered the post of Academic Director to Prof Gavin Flood, currently lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Stirling in Scotland. Granted the conditions on his secondment set by Stirling are fulfilled, Prof Flood will take up his Directorship in September 2005.

The OCHS Continuing Education Department is flourishing in cities around the country, and has won unparalleled praise and support for OCHS from its students. Meanwhile our important and rewarding links with the University of Oxford have continued to grow.

The first two titles in the Routledge Hindu Studies series, in association with OCHS have gone to press, with the series now expanding into a comprehensive and multidisciplinary programme of publications on Hindu theology, history and culture.

The Board has continued to be successful in maintaining the true charitable nature of the OCHS through voluntary services from a range of supporters of the Centre's aims. In this way the Centre has thrived through the provision of free graphic design, legal services, accountancy, auditors, copy paper and web server maintenance. Everyday life in the Centre is underpinned by the valuable support of volunteers in cooking, serving and cleaning for the popular weekly lunches, and the dinners and receptions that the Centre holds in order to promote scholarly association and public awareness. The Internship programme has been particularly successful, bringing us a number of bright and committed interns. All of these contributions continue to be of enormous value to the Centre, helping to facilitate our success and greatly reducing costs.

## **Development, Activities and Achievements**

The members of the Development Council, Mr Harish IK Patel, Mr Subhash Thakrar, Mr Hasu Manek, Mr Bharat Bhundia, Mr Nitin Palan, Mr Jayesh Popat and Mr Sanjay Gadhvi have continued to serve the OCHS throughout the year, contributing greatly to our development strategies and helping to realise them. The Council has been meeting to oversee and advise on issues of fund development, budgeting, accounting and publicity.

These high levels of interest and particularly the support of Nitin Palan led us in 2004 to appoint an OCHS Development Officer. This part-time post, designed to oversee and implement our grant-development, fund-raising and awareness-raising activities, has been taken up by Ms Jessica Frazier. Ms Frazier has extensive experience in public relations, grant-writing and administration, and as a scholar in Hindu philosophy at Cambridge and Oxford she has also been awarded a Junior Research Fellowship at the Centre. Already, the OCHS Continuing Education Department has won its first grant of £5000 from the Government Lottery Fund, Awards for all, to establish its new branch in Birmingham.

OCHS has continued to enjoy visits from a growing community of supporters in the public sphere. The Indian Institute of Technology UK Alumni enjoyed a highly successful visit to OCHS during the summer.

Meanwhile in America, we have now launched the US 'Friends of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies' organisation to celebrate and develop our connections on the other side of the Atlantic. OCHS also took steps to advance its awareness- and fund-raising initiatives, with longstanding Benefactors Harish Patel and Bharat Bhundia arranging a special fundraising event to coincide with a performance of India dance-drama 'Strictly Dandia' at the Lyric theatre in Hammersmith. We look forward to furthering our programme of successful events like these in the year to come. All of these many developments were celebrated in full at June's annual Board of Governors dinner at Oxford Town Hall.

## **Lectures and Seminars**

### **Michaelmas Term (Oct. – Dec.)**

#### **Lecture Series**

#### **Hindus in the Diaspora: Their Histories and Traditions**, Prof. Pratap Kumar

In this course Prof. Kumar gave a lecture series, which included a general survey of the histories of Hindu communities outside India. The series focused on the development and the maintenance of their traditions. More specifically the series unpacked issues related to the contemporary understanding of Hinduism and the implications that the developments of Diaspora Hinduism have on how we conceptualise Hinduism. The discourse looked at the orientalist constructions through classical texts and the predominantly oral traditions that have influenced the Diaspora Hinduism and raise methodological and theoretical issues in conceptualising Hinduism. Alongside these key issues, other issues such as how texts are interpreted in the Diaspora context and the notion of authoritativeness and orthodoxy were also focused on. The lecture was especially for students preparing papers in the study of Hinduism, although no background knowledge of Hinduism was required.

### **Modernity and Madhva Vedanta: The Beginning or the End of and Esoteric Tradition, Prof. Deepak Sarma**

In this course, Prof. Sarma emphasized how the Madhva School of Vedanta is an orthodox tradition that is being forced to rise to the challenges of modernity, and in particular, recent technological advances. The course focused on whether these changes are minor or whether they strike at the very heart of Madhva doctrine. The course also focused on the whether or not the changes will point towards its end or a chance flourish. Dr Sarma's talk concerned these and other related issues that would face any esoteric tradition. The lecture was especially for students preparing papers in the study of Hinduism, although no background knowledge of Hinduism was required.

### **The Wahlstrom Lecture**

#### **Transnational Religion: Hindu Traditions in Cambodia, 5th-12th centuries**

Professor Vasudha Narayanan (University of Florida, USA and Tamal Krishna Visiting Fellow, President of the American Academy of Religion [2001 - 2002])

### **Seminars**

**Vasudha Naryanan**, University of Florida, USA and Tamal Krishna Visiting Fellow  
"A poet and a philosopher: Two women in the Sri Vaishnava tradition."

**Vasantha Rangachar**, Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapur, and Andhra Pradesh and Shivdasani Visiting Fellow

"Board games a metaphor for spiritual growth."

Any discussion of the motivation of gambling usually starts with the natural comparison to life. Life is a gamble. Everyday, people are faced with situations which involve risk and chance. Professor Rangachar looks at the religious antecedents of gaming and the reaction to its development.

**Vasantha Rangachar**, Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapur, and Andhra Pradesh and Shivdasani Visiting Fellow

"Do games and play have a religious character"

The turf, the tennis court, the chess board, and pavement hopscotch cannot formally be distinguished from the temple or the magic circle. Game diagrams were built into roofing slabs or the floor of temples in ancient India, sometimes carved into the cloister seats. Professor Rangachar explores how the devotee, the deity, and the game met.

### **Special Seminar**

A Dialogue between:

**Deepak Sarma** (*Case Western Reserve University, USA*)

**& Jean-Marie Schmitt** (*St Cross College*)

" To Be Or not To Be?: A Madhva Criticism of 'Maya' and an Advaita Vedanta Response "

Scholars have challenged the integrity of the concept of Maya as propounded in Advaita Vedanta since it was first described. Deepak Sarma will offer several arguments taken from Madhvacarya's Mayavadakhandana (The Refutation of the Maya Position) and the Upadhikhandana (The Refutation of the Concept of the Limiting Adjunct) while Jean-Marie Schmitt will respond to them from the perspective of Advaita Vedanta. In this way the two will playfully enact a 1000 year old debate.

### **Hillary Term (Jan. – Mar.)**

#### **Lecture Series**

### **Hinduism I: Primary Texts in Translation**, Prof Francis X. Clooney SJ

These lectures, for which the source material lies (almost entirely) in Sanskrit texts read in English translation and with the help of reliable secondary sources, treats major components of the brahminical Hindu tradition which, though of ancient origin, is still relevant today. Particular attention will be paid to important themes developed in the listed primary texts read in translation. These lectures also paid close attention to early wisdom on Reality, God, and Self in the Upanishads; ritual theory in language and practice; how to live an orthodox life, the Laws of Manu; the world of Rama and Sita in the Ramayana of Valmiki; knowing acting and loving Krsna as stated in the Bhagavad Gita; and an approach to the religion of Shiva. The approach taken is classical and textual. These lectures are intended for students in theology and religious studies.

### **Majewski Lecture**

#### **On Defining Hinduism**, Prof. Julius Lipner

This lecture focused on the actual meaning of Hinduism. Hinduism is supposed to be a world religion, but is there such a thing as 'Hinduism'? And if so, what exactly are we speaking about? For reasons of self and subject definition in an increasingly competitive and globalised world, this vexed issue needs careful consideration. Dr Lipner will attempt to provide an original interpretation on this subject.

### **Relating to the 'Other': Hindu and Christian Perspectives**

Various speakers gave these lectures each week. They focused on understanding Hindus in an educational exercise and understanding the self and other, Christian and Indian traditions in historical perspectives, authority and scripture in Hindu and Christian thought, violence and peacemaking in Hindu and Christian traditions, Christian theological responses to Hinduism, and Hindus and Hinduism in contemporary Britain.

### **Hindu – Jewish Seminar**

#### **The Truth(s) of Translation**, Julius Lipner and Norman Solomon

This was the third of our joint seminars. We began with two sessions entitled, "Around the Table: A conversation on Jewish and Hindu dietary and dining customs". Dr Miri Freud-Kandel and Prof Ramaratnam led these seminars, in Trinity term 2003. This term we journeyed from the kitchen to the temple and delved deeper into both traditions and their approaches to truth and interpretation.

### **Seminars**

**Prof. FX Clooney SJ**, Academic Director OCHS

"Overview of participants academic projects"

**Prof. FX Clooney SJ**, Academic Director OCHS

"A Hindu Theology of Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition: Comments on Vedanta Desika's 14th Century *Guruparamparasaram*"

**Dr. Daniela Rossella**, University of Milan, Italy, OCHS Shivdasani Visiting Fellow

"Kavya, (literature as an art form) and Bhakti"

**Dr. Nilima Chitgopekar**, Delhi University, India, OCHS Shivdasani Visiting Fellow

"Devised Lineages and Pliant Biographies: A Study of Shiva and his Retinue "

**Dr. Daniela Rossella**, University of Milan, Italy, OCHS Shivdasani Visiting Fellow

"Christian nuptial mysticism and parallels with Indian mystical trends"

**Dr. Nilima Chitgopekar**, Delhi University, India, OCHS Shivdasani Visiting Fellow

"The Abundance and Vicissitudes of Multiplicity: The Case of 'Chaunsatha' Yoginis"

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## **Trinity Term (Apr. – Jun.)**

### **Lecture Series**

#### **Is there a Hindu Monotheism? Prof. Francis X. Clooney, SJ**

These lectures focused on Biblical and Christian reflection on monotheism, an inquiry, by way of four examples, into the nature of Hindu belief in one supreme divinity, asking whether such belief can be termed “monotheistic.” They also focused on the case of Krsna and Shiva as being the one true God, the reflection of the three Goddess hymns and the Devi Gita, and Rammohun Roy and 19th Century Hindu Monotheism. No background in Hindu studies required.

### **Hindu – Jewish Seminar**

**A Jewish Understanding of Monotheism in the Hebrew Bible: in Conversation with Hindu Perspectives**, Madhavi Nevader OCHJS and Oriel College

### **Majewski Lecture**

**What Do We Learn From the Iconography of the Goddess**, Dr. Sanjukta Gupta

### **Science and Religion Seminar**

**Cultural Myths, Biological Forms and Subjective Qualities: Western and Hindu Views on the Philosophy of Biology**, Prof. Brian Goodwin

### **Seminars**

**S. Ramaratnam**, Vivekananda College, (Chennai) and Shivdasani Visiting Fellow  
“Funerals and Life after Death: Some Hindu Perspectives”

**Nick Allen**, Social Anthropology, Oriental Institute

“The importance of Bhishma for Indo-European cultural comparativism”

**Christopher Melchert**, Arabic and Islam, Oriental Institute

“Islamic Monotheism and Islamic Piety: in Conversation with Hindu Perspectives”

**S. Ramaratnam and Francis Clooney** (OCHS Academic Director)

“A Conversation on Western and Indian Perspectives on Reading a Hindu Text: the case of the Bhagavad Gita.”

**George Pattison** (Lady Margaret Professor, Theology)

“A Christian Understanding of Monotheism: in Conversation with Hindu Perspectives”

**Jessica Frazier** (Cambridge University, D.Phil. Cand.)

“Continental Philosophy and Hindu Devotion: towards a metaphysics of passion.”

## **Continuing Education Department**

The OCHS Continuing Education Department (CED) has thrived this year, successfully facilitating excellence in Hindu Studies in the UK, and making a broad-based educational approach available to as wide an audience as possible. It has grown out of the successful pilot projects launched in London and Oxford and is now flourishing to great acclaim at centres in Harrow, Ilford, Leicester, Birmingham and Cambridge.

The Certificate in Hindu Studies is being offered by the OCHS in partnership with the University of Wales Lampeter (UWL), an acknowledged centre for theology and religious studies in the UK. A full degree is composed of 360 credits awarded at three different levels, which correspond to the three years of study generally undertaken for a university degree course. The great advantage of studying with the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies is that students can work at their own speed. Dr Nick Sutton has

continued as department Director, and teachers this year have included, Anuradha Dooney, Rembert Lutjeharms, and Dr Ravi Gupta.

This course is notable for the distinctive ethos underpinning the teaching and learning process. The broad aims are twofold. Firstly, it provides a high degree of factual knowledge about the belief systems and religious practices embodied in Hindu *dharma*. Secondly, it utilises this basis to encourage examination of the very notion of Hindu identity. Students will thus be invited to use the detailed knowledge they acquire as a means of exploring the essential meaning of the Hindu life as practiced in this country and elsewhere. Through a thorough exploration of the spiritual and religious resources that Hinduism makes available, this course aims to play a significant role in the emergence of a vibrant expression of British Hinduism that is both faithful to its traditions and entirely appropriate for the modern lifestyle.

### **Routledge Hindu Studies Book Series**

The Hindu Studies Book Series on which OCHS has collaborated with Routledge, yielded its first fruits this year. Our first title, *Epistemology and the Limitations of Philosophical Inquiry: Doctrine in Madhva Vedanta* by Deepak Sarma, was published in October. Further publication proposals have been submitted and two further titles are expected for 2005.

### **Students**

The Centre was honoured to welcome two new students this year, both from the U.S.A. **Claire Robinson** and **Ashiyana Nariani** are OCHS' first undergraduate students, and have contributed greatly to the life of the Centre. Clare Robinson has come to OCHS and Mansfield College from Washington D.C., to read for a BA degree in Theology here in Oxford. Ashiyana Nariani is in Oxford to combine Hinduism, Hindi and Mathematics in a year of undergraduate study at OCHS and Wadham College. Both students seem to be settling happily into Oxford, and we are very happy to have them here contributing to the life of the Centre.

### **Degrees Awarded**

The following students successfully completed their thesis and were awarded degrees from Oxford University:

**Kenneth Valpey**, USA (2001 - 2004) was granted a DPhil in Theology focusing on the doctrine of Murti-seva in Caitanya Vaishnava thought.

**Ravi Gupta**, USA (2002-2003) was granted a Dphil in Theology for his thesis on the Caitanya Vaishnava Vedanta of Jiva Gosvami.

As both scholars and practitioners of Hinduism, Kenneth and Ravi have contributed greatly to the life of the Centre. Their work has been extremely well-received, and they will now be submitting their theses for publication in the OCHS/Routledge Hindu Studies Book Series.

## **Fellowships Awarded**

### **Post Doctoral Fellowships Awarded**

#### **Kenneth Valpey**

B.A. (honours) in Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, USA, 1996.

M.A., 'The Cultural and Historical Study of Religion', Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, US. 1998.

MSt in the Study of Religion, Oxford University, 2000.

D.Phil, Oxford University, offering a dissertation on the modern meaning of Murti-seva, 2004.

#### **Savita Vij**

Dr Savita Vij joined OCHS Research team pioneering the Hindu Youth Survey with Romila Santosh in 2001. She completed her Ph.d thesis; 'The Politicisation of Hindu Identities in a University Context', in 2003, in the Sociology and Cultural Studies Department, Birmingham University. Her academic interest in work on young Hindus has progressed from her undergraduate years at Royal Holloway University through her B.A. honours in Sociology with Social Policy received in 1999.

### **Junior Research Fellowships Awarded 2004**

#### **Jessica Frazier**

B.A.(Hons) in Theology and Religious Studies (Part I Sanskrit), University of Cambridge (1998).

M.St in The Study of Religions, University of Oxford (1999). Currently completing a Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge, on Models of Belief: Realism in Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Rupa Gosvami's Devotional Philosophy.

### **Shivdasani Fellowships**

**Daniela Rossella** obtained her degree (promotion) in Sanskrit Language and Literature, magna cum laude, at the University of Milan, Italy, with an essay regarding the woman's condition in ancient India. She obtained her Ph.D. in 2000, magna cum laude, at the University of Rome, Italy, with an essay on women's characters in classical Indian poetry. Throughout her career, her work has followed two different, albeit parallel, trends: First, the women's position in India (both in past and the present) from the perspective of law, religion, literature, and sociology. Second, the study of Indian classical texts (epic, poetry, law, drama, innology, etc.), in order to reach a holistic vision of Indian civilisation. She has translated many Sanskrit texts, several of which had not yet been translated into any Western language, and written essays about classical Indian literature and about woman's position in ancient and modern Indian society. She has taken part, and will take part, to many international conferences and congresses. Since 1991, Dr. Rossella has served as Department Assistant in the Oriental Studies Department of the University Milano, Italy. From the academic year 2001-2002 she serves also as Department Assistant in the Department of Philosophical, Linguistic, and Literary-Linguistic Sciences of the University of Perugia (Italy), and she also works as Master organizer and tutor at IULM, the Free University of Languages and Communications of Milano. Lectures, lessons, speeches, researches, tutorship of students are parts of her work. Actually, she is engaged in two - again parallel - projects: 1) the first translation into Italian of the renowned Vidyaakara's anthology (the Subhaasitaratnakosha), destined to become a part of a larger study concerning Indian poetry; 2) an investigation about the relationship between Indian devotional poetry and Indian classical amorous lyric, along with a comparison with some Western mystical currents and their profane counterparts.

**Prof. K. Maheshvaran Nair** hails from Kerala, (Southern India) and is currently Professor, Department of Sanskrit, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram and also Hon. Director of the Centre for Vedanta Studies of the University of Kerala. Previously he worked at Govt. Sanskrit College, Thiruvananthapuram and Thrippunithura and also as Editor of the Dept. of Cultural Publications, Kerala. He has been teaching Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy for over three decades. His areas of research includes, dialectics in Vedanta and materialism, Patanjali's Yogasutra, The renaissance movement in Kerala, manuscript studies etc. He has published a number of articles and authored a number of books in Sanskrit, Malayalam and English which include Advaitasiddhi: A Critical study, Advaitavedanta Dialectics and Indian Philosophy, Manuscriptology, Chattambiswamikal:Jivithavum Krithikalum etc. He has also edited a number of books. He obtained his Ph.D. in Sanskrit from the University of Kerala and also holds a Masters Degree in Russian.

**Nilima Chitgopekar** is an Associate Professor and currently the Head of the History Department at the Jesus & Mary College ( Delhi University).Having taught there for over two decades her teaching assignments include The History of Ancient India and The History Of the USA. Along with this undergraduate teaching Nilima has been teaching the post-graduate students in a separate campus. Having completed a Ph.D on Development of Shivaism in Madhya Pradesh c. AD 550-1200 she was fortunate to immediately start teaching a course that was relevant to the kind of research she was involved in. The course is entitled Development in Indian Religions and the topics that she covered include The Emergence and Spread of Tantrism, The Evolution of the Vaishnava Pantheon and Growth of Shivaism.

Nilima Chitgopekar's interest in the study of religion is exemplified in the methodology used in her book Encountering Shivaism The Deity the Milieu the Entourage ( Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998). Here she looks at the development of a sect at a particular point of time and in a specific geographical locale. She attempts a holistic approach to a wide variety of sources-iconography, scriptures such as the Puranas and inscriptions. Chitgopekar also works in areas of gender studies. She recently edited a volume Invoking Goddesses Gender Politics in Indian Religion (Har Anand, 2002). Her most recent publication is a small monograph The Book of Durga (Penguin, 2003). At present she is writing a book on Shiva.

#### **Tamal Krishna Goswami Visiting Fellow**

**Prof. Vasudha Narayanan** is a Professor of Religion at the University of Florida and a past President of the American Academy of Religion (2001-2002). She was educated at the Universities of Madras and Bombay in India, and at Harvard University. Her fields of interest are the Sri Vaishnava tradition; Hindu traditions in India, Cambodia, America; Hinduism and the environment; and gender issues. She is the author and editor of six books and over ninety articles, chapters, and encyclopedia entries.

Her research has been supported by grants and fellowships from several organizations including the National Endowment for the Humanities (1987, 1989-90, and 1998-99), the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation (1991-92), the Smithsonian, the American Institute for Indian Studies, and the Social Science Research Council. She was the president of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies from 1996-1998. Her books The Hindu Tradition/s : An Introduction, and The Hindu Traditions in the United States: Temple Space, Domestic Space, and Cyberspace will be published soon in 2005. She is currently working on Hindu temples and Vaishnava traditions

in Cambodia and her research is being funded by the American Council of Learned Societies (2004-2005). Previous publications include: *The Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation, and Ritual* (1994); *The Way and the Goal: Expressions of Devotion in the Early Srivaisnava Tradition* (1987);

### **Research Projects**

The Centre is developing new research projects and finding new ways to maximise the impacts of existing ones. We have begun to plan new government-funded research projects in collaboration with Oxford University, that are aimed at illuminating the lives of contemporary Hindus throughout the cultures of the world.

With support from The Heritage Lottery Fund, the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies launched the nation-wide British Hindu Oral History Project as a travelling exhibition titled 'Aum away From Home'. The brainchild of scholars and Hindu community leaders, the project forms the first permanent record of the cultural and historical life of Hindus in Britain. The database of transcribed interviews with first generation Hindus will be stored in the Hindu Archive at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, serving as a basis for community awareness and future research.

### **OCHS Library**

The library has continued to grow in the academic year 2003-2004. Books from the OCHS library that are on undergraduate reading lists for Modern History and the Hinduism reading lists for Theology have been added to OLIS, the online union catalogue of Oxford University libraries. OCHS has also been in discussion with the librarian of the Theology Faculty about ways in which the OCHS library might support the growing need for books on Hinduism for courses within the Faculty.

### **Board of Governors Meeting and Dinner**

The annual meeting of the OCHS Board of Governors was held on the first of July. It was preceded by the Board of Governors Annual Dinner held in Oxford Town Hall, where senior academics and scholars from Oxford, Cambridge, London and Leeds, prominent Indian business people, and students of the Centre attended the fine meal and speeches, given to celebrate a very successful year at OCHS. Speakers included Prof Richard Gombrich, member of the Board of Governors, Mr Shaunaka Rishi das, Director of the Centre and our guest speaker, Mr Ranjit Sondhi, CBE, BBC Governor and Chairman of the English National Forum and member of the OCHS Patron's Council. Mr Sondhi spoke about the developments in Hindu Society, past and present, in Indian and in Britain. The evening was a great success, and a good time was unreservedly had by all.

### **In Memorandum:**

#### **Julia Leslie**

Dr Leslie, Chair of the Centre for Gender and Religions Research, and a great friend of the Centre, passed away on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2004. From her Oxford D.Phil on the Hindu ideal of the perfect woman, to her prolific career developing Gender Studies in the field of Indian Religions, Dr Leslie has always been a pioneering voice in Hindu Studies. As a member of our academic advisory council, she helped to guide OCHS towards its present success and self-understanding, and we will always be grateful for Dr Leslie's warm encouragement. She will be deeply missed.

**Approval**

This report was approved by the board of directors and trustees on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004 and signed on its behalf by,

**Shaunaka Rishi Das**