



OXFORD CENTRE
FOR HINDU STUDIES

Newsletter

Winter 2006

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OCHS Student wins Oxford's Clarendon Scholarship

<http://www.ochs.org.uk>

This term sees Gopal Gupta from Boise Idaho, USA, arriving at OCHS to pursue an MSt in Science and Religion. In recognition of his excellent work to date, the University of Oxford have awarded him a full Clarendon Fund Scholarship to support his studies at the Oxford

Centre for Hindu Studies. The highly sought-after Clarendon Scholarship, which is given to encourage scholarship in important and often ground-breaking fields, covers the fees for Gopal's Masters and Doctoral degrees in the emergent field of Science and Hinduism.

Gopal comes to Oxford fresh from having completed BA and MA degrees at Boise State University, Idaho at the age of 19. Achieving straight A's there, his Master's work focused primarily on Artificial Intelligence, winning him the United States Achievement Academy National Engineering Collegiate Award. But throughout that period, in addition to excelling in the area of Engineering, in his own time Gopal has kept up extensive studies in Hindu theology and philosophy. Not surprisingly given his eclectic background, he developed an interest in the relationship between Science and contemporary Hindu thought.

"There are two great forces that influence people," says Gopal, "science and religion". "These two disciplines have inspired the world's greatest individuals, events, and architecture. It behooves us to see how they work together. The Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies is a wonderful asset to the field. One of the most fascinating and enduring issues in the modern world is the relationship between scientific thought and religious belief. The Centre provides me with an opportunity to explore the relationship between science and religion in ancient and contemporary India."

"Hinduism's wisdom in science and cosmology are largely hidden to the world. Yet Hinduism's contributions to science are magisterial in scope, rich in detail and intellectually stimulating. I hope that my time here at Oxford will provide me an opportunity to delve deeper into this subject and make it more accessible to the modern world."

Gopal is following in the footsteps of his brother Ravi Gupta, who graduated from Oxford and the OCHS two years ago. He is now teaching Hinduism at the University of Florida and looking forward to the publication of his thesis in the OCHS Routledge Hindu Studies book series. We look forward to discovering the insights about Hindu culture that both Gopal and Ravi will have to share with us in the coming years.

Creating the Hebrew Gita

by Ithamar Theodor

<http://www.ochs.org.uk>

Prior to coming to Oxford to read for an M.Litt at the OCHS, my three years of M.A. at the University of Tel Aviv were devoted to work on the Bhagavad Gita.

The M.A. degree is a larger project in Israel than at most universities internationally, and the thesis was to be about 80,000 words long – the size of a Doctorate at Oxford or

Cambridge. I decided that, in essence, my main thrust would be to articulate the composition of the Bhagavad Gita, showing that it does indeed have a well-defined structure that is conceptually quite coherent.

Many scholars see the Gita as an aggregation of various ideas penned by various authors, put together in order to supply a "Hindu" answer to the rising influence of Buddhism. The approach that I took was philosophical as opposed to linguistic. In the search for coherency, rather than examining the linguistic structure of the Gita, I looked into its conceptual structure. It had occurred to me that the concept of reality in the Gita is primarily hierarchical, and that opened out the possibility of a better understanding. On this basis, I searched the text for the means by which one could promote oneself up the ladder of actions leading from the lower to the higher stages. This "ladder" of salvation is a traditionally accepted idea, and I have intertwined it into my study.

The result was a fuller articulation of the Gita's clear and coherent structure. Now what was left was for me to offer a full verse translation from Sanskrit into Hebrew, along with a commentary demonstrating how the text fits onto this ladder-like structure. The translation was accepted for my degree with honours, and was subsequently accepted by a leading publisher under governmental auspices, and published in 2002. Today, it has become the standard academic Bhagavad gita edition for University courses in Israel.

Ithamar Theodor completed an M.Litt on Vedanta and the concept of "Rasa" at Oxford University and the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies in 2004. He currently teaches Indian thought at the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Haifa, Israel. His Hebrew translation of the Bhagavad Gita is available from Carmel Publishers.

Ranjit Sondhi CBE launches OCHS in Leicester

http://www.ochs.org.uk/publications/ranjit_sondhi_speech_18112005.html

On Friday 18th of November at the Leicester Stage Hotel the OCHS held "An Evening with Ranjit Sondhi CBE". The impetus for the dinner, prompted by the Sir Mark Tully Dinner held in London, in May, came from Mr Vijay Thakrar. A team of our Leicester friends organised, managed and executed the evening wonderfully.

The evening was part of the OCHS Awareness-raising Campaign and a regional launch to the business community in Leicester and it was a tremendous success. Ranjit Sondhi, a BBC Governor, very kindly agreed to share his thoughts on being a British Indian as our main speaker for the event. The main sponsors were ICICI Bank and Yorkshire Bank and we had 270 people who came to enjoy the evening. We held a raffle and an auction, which made the evening profitable, exceeding our expectations. Everyone seemed to have a great time and the feedback forms confirmed this.

The talks began with the spirited oration of eleven-year-old Devarshi. Explaining that he was from the "Why? generation", Devarshi said, "many children of my age agree that not enough is being done to them teach the basics of Hinduism. This leads to problems and embarrassment for us." His talk was followed by Priti Raichura, Chair of Leicester Hindu Youth UK, and Shaunaka Rishi Das launching the OCHS in explaining our achievements, our relevance to society and our need for support.

The main presentation, "The Middle Way: On Being a Indian in Britain Today.", by Ranjit Sondhi, was very well received. This talk included questions from the floor and sparked an engaging dialogue. Ranjit began by observing that, "Our lives are now more complexly constructed than ever before. We struggle to reconcile tensions between choice and constraint, freedom and security, individual aspiration and collective provision, enterprise and equity, risk and guarantee. The search for a middle way has become more and more pressing and urgent."

Musical entertainment was provided by the dulcet tones and wonderful artistry of Chandubhai Mattani and band. We are indebted to Chandubhai for his kindness to the OCHS and for satisfying the hearts of our audience.

One of the notable successes of the evening was the development of a strong and committed OCHS Midlands team led by Vijay, and including Bikhubhai Hindocha, Raj Chauhan, Jagdish Ghelani and Manish Thakrar. We had a team of about 20 members of Hindu Youth UK who were kind enough to do all the setting up and practical arrangements.

OCHS Director wins top seat at Harvard

http://www.ochs.org.uk/news/15032005_000.htm

Francis X. Clooney, one of the world's leading comparative-theology scholars, has followed his directorship of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies by becoming the new Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard Divinity School.

"The Parkman Professorship was established in 1814 and is one of the Divinity School's most venerable chairs," Harvard Divinity School Dean William A. Graham said in announcing the appointment. "The last incumbent was John Braisted Carman, and it is gratifying that HDS has been able to attract yet another acclaimed scholar whose work naturally flows between theology and the comparative history of religion."

Francis X. Clooney, a Roman Catholic priest and a member of the Society of Jesus, has devoted his work to the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity, and is the prolific

author of many books in that area. Clooney earned a doctorate in South Asian Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago in 1984 and has since enjoyed a rich career exploring diverse aspects of Hindu Studies. He was the first president of the International Society for Hindu-Christian Studies and Coordinator for Interreligious Dialogue for the Society of Jesus prior to his appointment as Academic Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies from 2002-2004.

"I am grateful for this appointment as the Parkman Professor of Divinity, and I look forward to joining the Divinity School and Harvard University," said Clooney. "Today's world is witnessing great changes in the study of religions as the great faith traditions revive and renew themselves, while contemporary pluralism creates unprecedented challenges and possibilities for all believers. Needed more than ever are theologians who are conversant in their own traditions, yet willing to cross boundaries and learn from the faith and practice of people of diverse faiths.

"Harvard Divinity School, in conjunction with its Center for the Study of World Religions, and the University's Committee on the Study of Religion, offers unparalleled resources for the study of classical and living traditions. As a Roman Catholic comparative theologian who studies Hindu religious traditions, I look forward to sharing in a great conversation that will shape theologies, the study of religions, and ministerial practice, in the decades to come."

We wish Prof. Clooney great success in his future studies under this prestigious new appointment.

Discovering Ancient Societies in Hindu Temples

http://www.ochs.org.uk/publications/multimedia/mp3_downloads.html

Our Shivdasani Visiting Fellow for Michaelmas term was Dr Himanshu Prabha Ray, who took a term away from the Centre for Historical Studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi to explore the archaeology of ancient Hindu temples in her talks at the OCHS.

With degrees in Archaeology, Sanskrit and Ancient Indian History, Dr Ray was well equipped to give an inter-disciplinary perspective on much neglected aspects of the ancient Indians' experience of everyday life. In past publications, from *Monastery and Guild: Commerce under the Satavahanas* (Oxford University Press, 1986), to *The Archaeology of Seafaring in Ancient South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), Dr Ray has revealed the infrastructure of travel and commerce that underpins the life of the sub-continent in every century. She pioneered this approach in a new field during her stay at OCHS, with an exploration of the archaeology of sacred space in Hindu temples.

'Temple architecture is an important indicator of interaction with diverse interest groups, such as worshippers, ritual specialists, patrons, artisans, etc.' she writes. Dr Ray used her OCHS lectures and seminars to demonstrate how modern archaeology failed to see temples in the light of their religious and philosophical context. In addition she explained how interpretations that highlighted the cultural pluralism of Indian temples, were replaced with more monotheistic religious identities as a result of 20th century legislation. She also demonstrated how the classical themes of Hindu religion, exemplified in such literature as the Ramayana, provided a rich thread of continuity throughout.

Dr Ray's lectures, in audio format and with extensive notes, can be downloaded from the OCHS website.

Routledge Hindu Studies Book Series

<http://www.routledge.com/asianstudies>

The Routledge Hindu Studies Series, in association with OCHS, is going from strength to strength under the auspices of new editor, Prof. Gavin Flood. Developed to bring the depth and originality of current scholarship into the public sphere, the Routledge/OCHS series brings ancient Hindu traditions into dialogue with the latest trends in contemporary thought. New and forthcoming titles explore new horizons for understanding India's religion, history and culture.

Samkara's Advaita Vedanta: A Way of Teaching. **J.G. Southren Hirst**

Samkara (c.700 CE) has been regarded by many as the most authoritative Hindu thinker of all time. A commentator on the sacred texts of the Vedas, Samkara was also a great Brahmin and teacher in the Advaita tradition. Based on a ground-breaking approach to Samkara's seminal texts, Hirst shows us the profound inter-relationship between text and practice in the life and works of the first great Vedantic thinker. Interwoven into his philosophy, Samkara's teaching method leaves its mark, intended to draw pupils skilfully towards that knowledge which is beyond words. This book is of importance to all those interested in the relation between language, and that which is held to transcend it.

Attending Krishna's Image: Chaitanya Murti-seva as Devotional Truth **Kenneth Valpey**

Hindu Devotionalism (bhakti) is increasingly understood not only as a system of beliefs, but as a spiritual practice performed in the presence of God. As a result, scholars are

learning to understand sacred images as embodiments of the divine. This book considers these issues in modern Hinduism, looking at the images and worship of Krishna, in both India and the West. In particular it focuses on the Chaitanya Vaishnava tradition as it makes its home in different cultures and different ages, by actively participating in the presence of Krishna.

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The OCHS web team have launched a section of our website devoted to lecture downloads. Presently we can offer downloads in MP3 format but we are also working on facility to listen online and Podcasts.

These lectures and seminars are offered mainly as reference material for scholars and students interested in the topics covered. We offer the service in an effort to help develop the field of Hindu Studies and make good scholarship more accessible. The recordings are unedited so we ask listeners to please excuse any discrepancies in quality of sound or professionalism. We hope to develop this resource to become an important resource for anyone interested in Hindu Culture, its philosophies, literature, art, history and societies, in all times and every part of the world.

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