



OXFORD CENTRE  
FOR HINDU STUDIES

## Newsletter

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**OCHS NEWSLETTER - Winter 2006-2007**

**Contents:**

- **OCHS Helps International Hindu Studies Grow**
- **Fund Raising Campaigns**
- **OCHS Unveils its Online Lecture Library: MP3 Lectures and Podcasts**
- **Diwali, Desire and Different Religions: Recent Events at OCHS**
- **“Lakshmi comes and goes but Sarasvati stays forever”: New Scholarships bring good fortune to OCHS students**
- **New Students at OCHS**


## **OCHS Helps International Hindu Studies Grow**

Our ambition to encourage international growth in Hindu studies has borne new fruit in agreements with universities as far apart as Baroda and Florida.

The development of Hindu Studies is now a global concern, yielding affiliations that bring together scholars, students, fresh perspectives, and new insights, in a common appreciation of Hindu culture and its importance for the world.

### **Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda**

Scholars and public figures have expressed concern that India is losing appreciation of its religious history due to a lack of objective study of Hindu culture in colleges and universities. The Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU) of Baroda, one of Gujarat's largest universities, has embraced this challenge.

In 2006, the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies welcomed Mr Manoj Soni, the Vice Chancellor of MSU, to Oxford, to discuss ways to enrich the study of the Hindu tradition in Indian higher education. That discussion has resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding between the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and MSU, stating their shared aim to "foster and facilitate a collaborative relationship to enrich and expand studies related to Hindu culture, religion, languages, literature, philosophy, history, arts, and society, in all periods and in all parts of the world." 

The OCHS anticipates Oxford scholars visiting India and new Shivdasani visiting scholars from Baroda bringing their unique perspective to Oxford as a result of this agreement.

OCHS is also making plans for a Joint Consultative Group comprising representatives of MSU, OCHS, independent scholars, and philanthropists.

There are also plans for an international conference of senior scholars from Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard with Indian scholars to look at the idea of religious studies in India from an interdisciplinary perspective.

## University of Florida

In 2005 Professor Vasudha Narayanan, the University of Florida's Distinguished Professor of Religion, came to the OCHS as a visiting scholar. After two months of discussion, discovery, and earnest exchange, she carried the Centre's unique vision back to Florida with her.

One year later the [Centre for the Study of Hindu Traditions \(CHiTra\)](#) was born at the University of Florida in Gainesville, aiming to "enrich the understanding of Hinduism within the academic community and among the general public".

The Centre in Florida embraces Hindu diaspora studies, Indian arts, and collaborative learning. Hinduism is the third-largest religion in the world, yet "people aren't really clear about what the word Hindu means," said Prof. Narayanan. "This is a global and multidisciplinary study of Hindu culture."

As a result of this partnership two OCHS alumni, Dr Ravi Gupta and Dr Kenneth Valpey, taught courses in Eastern religions at the Centre for the Study of Hindu Traditions.

## Fund Raising Campaigns

Last year's official recognition of the OCHS by Oxford University has established our academic credentials. Recent progress in fund development is a step towards stabilising our future.

### 2006 Shortfall Appeal

In November 2006, we held a Benefactors meeting to look at that year's shortfall of £40,000. The appeal, launched by the Benefactors Council and co-ordinated by Dr Ramesh Shamdasani, ably assisted by Kamlesh Patel, Jamin Patel, Harish I. K. Patel, and Upendra Kalan raised £41,500.

The extra £1500 has been put into a corpus account that is being built up to protect against future deficits.

Our Board of Governors and Benefactors Council would like to thank all our friends who have made this appeal such a wonderful success.

## **Annual Revenue Campaign, 2007-2011**


With 2006 taken care of, we have to take a longer view and avoid future shortfalls. To that end we began our Annual Revenue Campaign. The aim of this campaign is to raise funding of £250,000 per year for five years (2007-11). This will enable us to make the essential academic and administrative appointments necessary to maintain our educational ethos and develop our ability to facilitate gifted students and scholars.

Although only launched in December 2006, this campaign, headed by Lord Dholakia, has reached 45% of its target. Launching the campaign, Lord Dholakia said: "In 2006 the OCHS received official recognition from Oxford University. Now is the time for us to get behind the Centre financially. The Centre is something we can all be truly proud of and it can flourish, if we support it."

## **Website: Friends and Benefactors**

Of course, this being the 21st century, no fund-development is complete without website support.

We've recently introduced a [Donate page](#) on our [website](#). This is very useful for friends who would like to support us with one-off donations, big or small.

More importantly, we are revamping the Friends and Benefactors section of the site. The aim of the new section will be to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to our friends and benefactors and to show how vital a contribution they are making to society through their generous support. We aim to have this section live by mid-February. 

Our friends and benefactors are linked into an important knowledge base of scholars and experts, and have access to our library, public events, and more intimate gatherings. As supporters of global education and understanding they deserve public recognition of their support.

## **OCHS Unveils its Online Lecture Library: MP3 Lectures and Podcasts**

The OCHS has officially unveiled its unique Online Library of over 100 MP3 recordings of lectures and seminars. Anyone with a computer and an internet connection now has free access to the best of Oxford's teaching about Hindu Culture.

From Female Yoginis to Christian Ashrams, from Hindu Psychology to the history of NRIs, you can find a topic that whets your appetite.

The OCHS is committed to the idea that academic insights are meant for everyone.

These open and often challenging discussions are offered by the OCHS as reference material for scholars, students, and anyone else with an interest in the heritage of Hindu culture. The Online Lecture Library is another step in the effort to develop the field of Hindu Studies by sharing the insights of leading professionals in the field who have visited OCHS over the years.

Stretching from 2003 to the present and growing with each new term, the library ranges from introductory surveys of major Hindu themes, texts and traditions; single lectures on topics like Women in the Mahabharata or Poetry in the Vedas; discussions with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Scholars, and seminars on Hindi Cinema. Listen to Sir Mark Tully talk about the importance of India's 'Middle Way' approach to cultural tolerance or hear a whole lecture given in Sanskrit.

As lectures and seminars are recorded they are made available at [www.ochs.org.uk/publications/multimedia/mp3\\_downloads.html](http://www.ochs.org.uk/publications/multimedia/mp3_downloads.html).

## Podcasts

To broaden the audience further the OCHS has introduced podcasts as an even easier way to receive audio files. Simply subscribe using a programme such as Juicer, iPodderX, Odeo, or iTunes, and new podcasts are delivered directly to your computer.

To start off our new podcasts, we are delivering our "Introduction to Hinduism" series to the public in a programme of sixteen lectures by Prof. Gavin Flood. These provide an excellent introduction to the many facets of Hinduism for any audience.

Podcasts can be subscribed to through iTunes or from the homepage of our website, [www.ochs.org.uk](http://www.ochs.org.uk).

# Diwali, Desire, and Different Religions: Recent Events at OCHS

The past few months at OCHS have been busy ones, full of talks and events that brought OCHS scholars together with a wider public, in a shared love of Indian culture.

## Diwali at the Ashmolean

For Diwali this year, OCHS joined forces with the Ashmolean Museum's Inter-Faith Exhibitions Service (AIFES) to celebrate with a programme of Indian art, music and stories.

The Ashmolean was Britain's first museum, and the Diwali celebrations began with a programme of performances and story-telling set in the museum's beautiful 17th century neo-classical halls. Performers shared the excitement of the Ramayana with Oxford friends and families before returning in a "procession of lights" for chai at OCHS, where more surprises were in store. Oxford families enjoyed live music and a

superb re-enactment of Sita's rescue. The OCHS was transformed into a lively theatre as the younger members of the audience helped to stage a spirited drama. Fun was had by all and the day marked a successful collaboration between OCHS and the Ashmolean, together making the Hindu festival of lights an even bigger part of Oxford life.

## **British Council and Royal Commonwealth Society**


November saw OCHS teaming up with the British Council and the Royal Commonwealth Society for a lunchtime panel debate bringing together top scholars in Indian history, religion, and philosophy to discuss "The Hindu Phenomenon: Perspectives on India's past, present and future." A wide range of thought-provoking questions from the audience turned the lecture into a lively discussion touching on topics from Hindu Ethics to India's present economic success. OCHS looks forward to further collaborations with the British Council and Royal Commonwealth Society.

## **Comparative Dialogue**

This was also the term in which the world came to OCHS to offer Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian perspectives on universal concerns.

Comparative Theology was the theme of seminars and symposia in which scholars compared Hindu ideas with other theologies. On 9th November, the OCHS held a very successful conference at Regent's Park College in association with the Centre for Christianity and Culture. This one-day symposium brought together Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu perspectives on the theme of Desire.

Desire is an idea that has been the focus of much discussion in religious traditions over the centuries. It has often been seen as a negative quality which keeps people in bondage, but desire for a greater good is also a profoundly positive force. The speakers included Prof. Keith Ward on Christianity, Dr Ulrike Roesler on Buddhism, and Dr Dermott Killingley on Hinduism, offering astute presentations and laying the ground for the excellent discussions that followed.

OCHS Theological Dialogues have always been a great success, and this term's Hindu-Muslim discussion on the "Singularity of God" was no exception. Dr Yahya Michot and Mr Rembert Lutjeharms exchanged views with a sizeable and diverse Oxford audience, discovering wide-ranging parallels between ideas of God in the two traditions. One might think that - with the "million" deities often ascribed to Hinduism, and Islam's commitment to Tawhid, the singularity of God - the two religions would find themselves disagreeing on the nature of the divine. But what came out of this talk is the need to avoid one-sided, simplistic views of such rich and multi-faceted religious traditions. 


It was a stimulating evening and we look forward to more Comparative Theology discussions to come, including the "Icon and Murti", Hindu-Christian dialogue planned for the 2007 spring term.

# "Lakshmi comes and goes but Sarasvati stays forever": New Scholarships bring good fortune to OCHS Students

New scholarships are being established and awarded to deserving students at the OCHS, making life easier for those who are studying far from home.

Two "Asvatta Narayana" scholarships were awarded at a special lunch marking the end of the Michaelmas term for OCHS students old and new. Dr Giri Rajagopalan formally presented cheques to Mr Rembert Lutjeharms from Belgium and Mr Kiyokazu Okita from Japan, explaining that she and her husband set up the scholarship because "Lakshmi comes and goes, but Sarasvati stays forever." The award is named after her father who came from a village where no one could afford higher studies, but who went on to achieve great success in his own work so that his children would have the the benefits of a good education.

Further scholarships have now been set up to help OCHS students. One of the Centre's first alumni, Dr Ravi Gupta, who was also one of the Centre's first PhD graduates and one of the youngest-ever students to gain a PhD at Oxford University, has now set up an annual scholarship of £1000 per year with earnings from his first permanent lecturing position. Dr Gupta, who gave the keynote speech at the 2006 Board of Governors Dinner at Oxford Town Hall, has won a permanent lectureship at Centre College, Kentucky. He set up the award with the goal of aiding existing students, and inspiring them to give back to the Centre. He said "The OCHS is a like a second home - without it many students would not have gained their degrees from Oxford. It makes sense to give back to an institution that has given so much."

Another invaluable annual scholarship for £1108 has been kindly donated by Raj and Ramila Chauhan, friends of the OCHS. The OCHS is hoping that the Pundit Abaji Scholarship will make study in Oxford possible for a deserving Indian student. 

Finally, thanks to another longstanding friend and supporter of the Centre, one student will be awarded the TGPF scholarship for £500 in the coming term. Set up "to assist a capable and worthy student" with his or her studies, the TGPF scholarship was set up to commemorate the hard work of the benefactor's father who believed that the "the best way one can help a fellow human being is by education." The donor wishes to remain anonymous.

## New Students at OCHS

This term sees new students from an unprecedented range of backgrounds studying at OCHS. Each is bringing new interests, aims, and perspectives to the life of the Centre while qualifying for their Oxford degrees.

Every year existing OCHS students graduate to higher degrees or become full alumni of the Centre, teaching and publishing internationally in the field of Hindu Studies.

And every year a new batch of undergraduate and masters students arrive from around the world. In October six new students began their studies here, each with a different story.

Bhavisha Tailor had already been a student of the OCHS Continuing Education Department, attending courses in Harrow. It was this that persuaded her to leave her job and return to university full-time to study her own culture in greater depth. "I was working in finance, and I took a part-time course in Hindu Studies that was being run by the OCHS in London," she explained. "I wanted to go on to further study, and Oxford just seemed like a natural progression."

Now reading for an M.St in the Study of Religions at Mansfield College, Oxford, Saddhu Paramtattvadas is another student who had been studying Hinduism in London before he came to the centre, but his story is a very different one. He already has a MA in Sanskrit from Karnataka State University and further qualifications in Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy. But he felt the need to explore his tradition in a new way, learning about other religions and other perspectives. "I wanted to come and study Hinduism because it was an opportunity for me to put my own faith under the scrutiny of scholarship, and to come back and reflect upon that and make a more articulate and meaningful contribution to the world" he said. 🙏

Nizar Manek is currently pursuing a BA in Sanskrit in the Oriental Studies Faculty at Oxford, and is enjoying the chance to study his own culture as a full-time pursuit. But his Hindu studies at Oxford have a more practical application as well: "I have come to Oxford to study Sanskrit, which is giving me the skills of analysis, method, and articulation that will serve me well in my future career in law."

Trent Moyer has arrived at Hertford College, Oxford, as a visiting student after taking time away from his degree in Religion and Political Change at Virginia's George Mason University. Here in Oxford he will study Hinduism and Buddhism with Oxford's array of top names in the field.

Already holding Sanskrit degrees from the Universities of Delhi and Pune, Mrinal Kaul is now studying for a M.St in Oriental Studies at St Cross College, Oxford, with a specialization in Kashmiri Shaivism.

We also welcome Reshma Maharaj, who has come all the way from Trinidad to study for her degree at Oxford.

The OCHS is very pleased to welcome its class of 2006-7, and looks forward to a rich and stimulating year.

We wish our friends and supporters the same.