

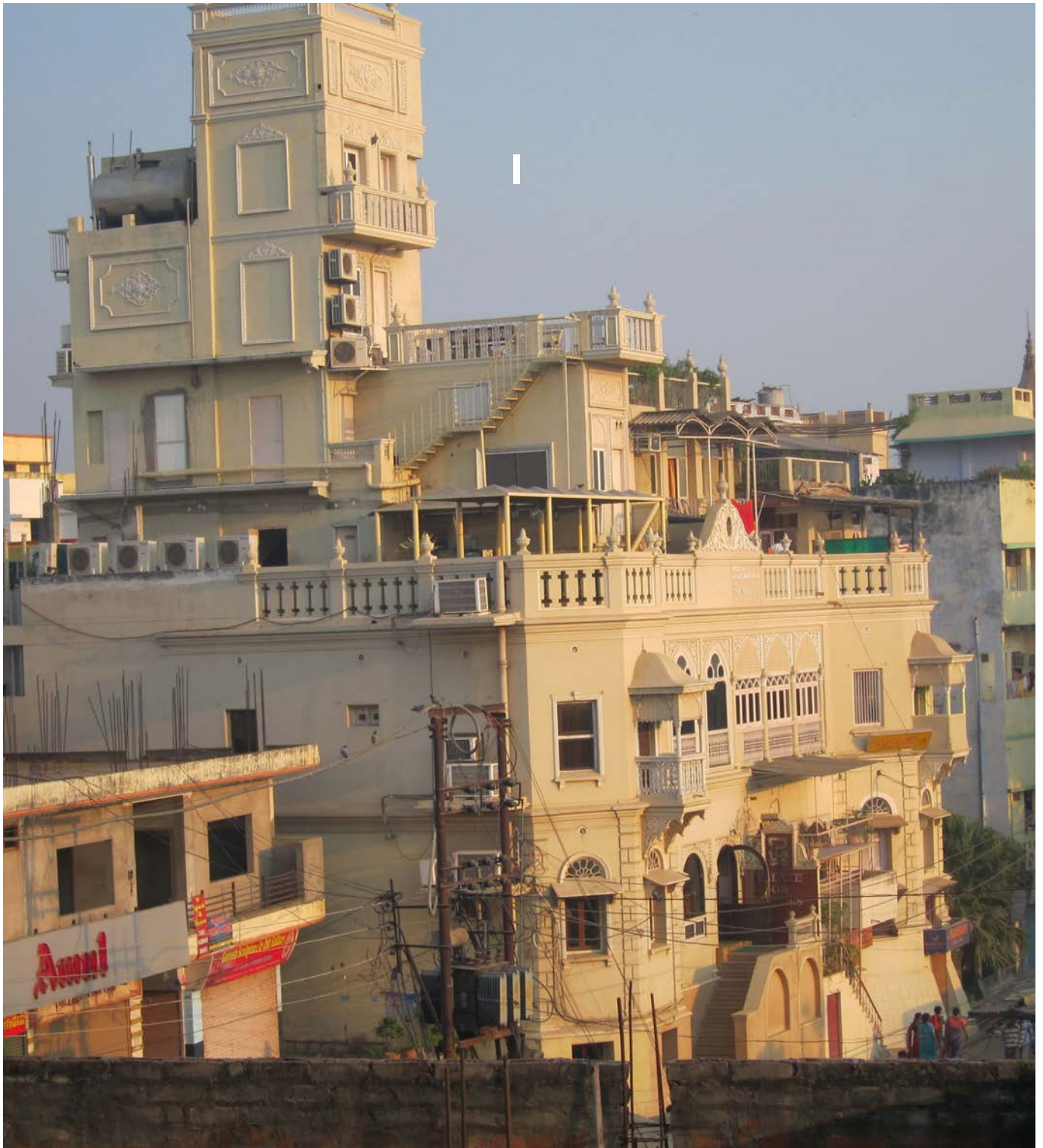
Resebrev Nr 110

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VARANASI



In 2012, I spent the period 20 October till 30 November in India. 2012, setting up a small SASNET office at our Sardar Sankar Rd residence in Kolkata, interacting with SASNET networking partners at the prime universities in Kolkata. I also made a contact journey to universities and other institutions in the north Indian cities of Varanasi, Kanpur and Delhi. First stop Varanasi – with the main purpose to visit the Swedish/Nordic study centres in the city, and of course the well-renowned Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

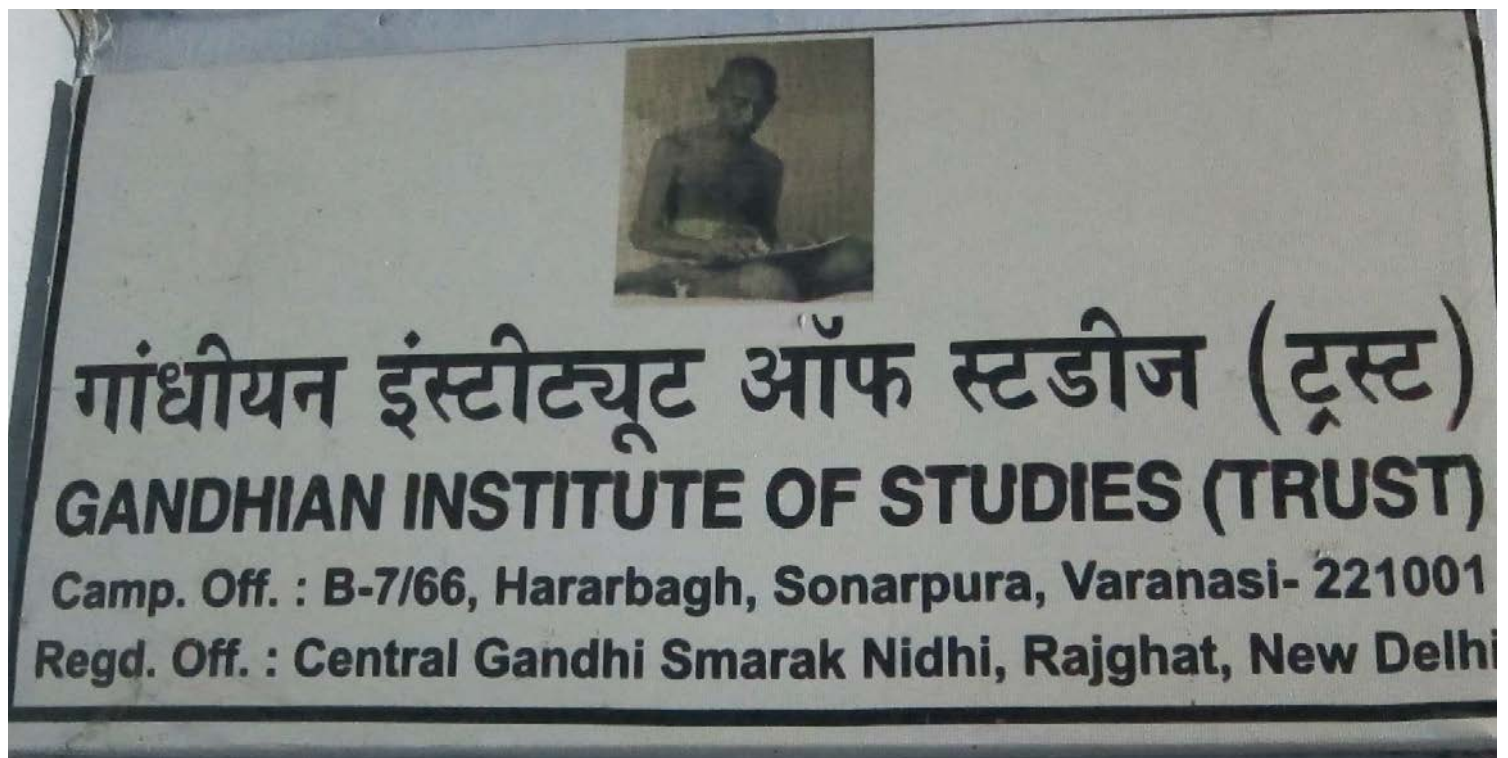








Dipak Malik at Gandhian Institute of Studies





Ashok Kaul to the left along with Lars Eklulb and Dipak Malik

Hindi Studies Centre



Conversation class for Peter Aggarwal from Stockholm University with Hindi teacher Punam Mishra

Meeting with Social Sciences faculty at BHU





Meeting with Professor Priyankar Upadhyaya and staff at Malaviya Centre for Peace Research





Karlstad University Study Centre (Ganga Mahal)





Juval Pruitt and Victoria Lundin



Gandhian Institute of Studies
Malaviya Institute/BHU

New ICCR Professor for Gothenburg
Hindi Study Centre

BHU/Social Sciences
Karlstad University Study Centre

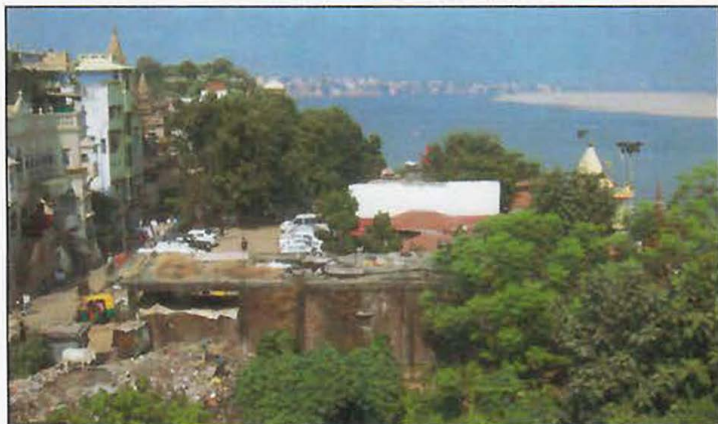
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By Lars Eklund

On Sunday 28 October 2012 I left my SASNET Kolkata office for a nine days contact journey to Varanasi, Kanpur and Delhi. First stop was Varanasi, where I reached in late afternoon by a comfortable Jet Airways flight.

From the airport, it was a long ride by taxi into Varanasi city.

The traffic is totally anarchic and chaotic without any traffic lights and few policemen on duty. Cars, motorcycles, scooters, horsedrawn wagons, cycle rikshas, cyclists, cows and a large number of pedestrians inbetween fight their way forward in a completely suicidal manner. However, after settling at Hotel Temple on Ganges near the river front at Assi Ghat, peace was restored, I was warmly welcomed by Professor Dipak Malik from the Gandhian Institute of Studies, who had arranged for my Varanasi programme. Professor Malik has a close connection to SASNET, being a member of its South Asian Reference Group.



Gandhian Institute of Studies



In the evening, a visit was made to the premises of the Gandhian Institute, situated in a 200 years old house in the cluster of narrow lanes of an old part of the city, not very far from Assi Ghat. The institute was formed in 1960 as an autonomous research Institute, by late Jayaprakash Narayan in 1960 as an "attempt to link Gandhian movement with Social Science." Its focus lies on village studies, civil society, social movements of transformation and conflict resolution. Since a few years, a judicial dispute is going on concerning the management of the Gandhian Institute, since during the BJP regime 1998-2004 the government tried to grab control of the institute. This has led to the fact that a competing institution with



the same name exists in Varanasi, and continuous court sessions being held in Allahabad courts. Read more about the crisis, <http://gandhianinstitute.org/History.html>

In order to restore normality, Professor Malik and his colleagues therefore decided to

establish the Gandhian Institute of Studies Trust (GIST) in 2007, as a Trust with objectives to carry on both fundamental and applied study and research basing on Gandhian World view, inferences from the praxis of Gandhian movement of social transformation. GIST is working in collaboration with Swedish academics and universities.

Dr. Mirja Juntunen, former Director for the [Nordic Centre in India](#), now working at Aarhus University, Denmark, is an Honorary Senior Fellow at GIST, and negotiations are under way with University of Gothenburg on collaboration regarding village studies. The village study programme is also located at a GIST Campus in Jamui, Bihar.

New ICCR Professor at University of Gothenburg

In the evening, a dinner meeting was organised with [Ashok Kumar Kaul](#), Professor of Sociology at Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Prof. Kaul has been selected to become the first Visiting Indian ICCR Professor at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. He will join the position in January 2013, and stay for six months. His contact person in Gothenburg is Professor Åke Sander at the [Department of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion](#).



Ashok Kaul to the left along with Lars Eklund and Dipak Malik.

Prof. Kaul has a doctorate from BHU, and thirty years of lecturing and research experience at a number of universities in India and internationally. Originally coming from Kashmir, Prof. Kaul has written a book entitled "*Kashmir: Fractured Nativity (Closed Options, Open Possibilities)*". It was published by German publisher VDM in 2009, and an edited version "*Kashmir: Contested Identity*" was published by Rawat Publications in India in 2011. [More information about the book](#).

City with three names

Waking up on Monday morning, 29 October 2012, at Temple Hotel in Varanasi and looking out at the river Ganges, sacred for all Hindus, on a clear and bright day in the end of October is really a spectacular experience. The sacredness of the place does however not mean that everything is



great. The view from the hotel consists not only of pilgrims in colourful dresses but also a garbage dump right next to Assi ghat, something that even the local newspapers have highlighted. The streets are not maintained at all, and sometimes I wonder how it could be that so many westerners get attracted to this dirty and nondecrepit city in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The city actually has three names, besides the official Varanasi it is also known as either Kashi or Benares. It has since long time back been a favourite destination for westerners interested in classical Indian music, and Indian religious traditions and philosophy. The Banaras Hindu University (BHU) has also drawn many foreign students to Varanasi over the years. And lately the city has also become a prime destination for western students coming for language studies.

My programme in Varanasi included meetings with researchers at BHU but also visits to the two Swedish/Nordic study centres existing in the city.

Hindi Studies Centre

In 2011, former Nordic Centre in India (NCI) coordinator Dr. Mirja Juntunen introduced a Hindi Study Programme in Varanasi, mainly for Hindi/Indology students from her then home university Stockholm, but also for students from other NCI member universities such as Oslo and Aarhus. The programme was initially



run by NCI in collaboration with the Gandhian Institute of Studies.

During the spring semester 2011 it attracted a handful students from Stockholm University, and for the fall semester there came 16 people from Oslo and Aarhus, Hindi students on an advanced level.



From 2012, the organisational structure has been changed. The programme is now run by the Centre for the Study of Indian Languages and Society, a public trust set up to organise Hindi studies in an organised way in modern and well-equipped premises in a new building. Dr. Juntunen, now

working at Aarhus University, is the Academic Director for the Centre, whereas Mr. John Moldén (*photo to the right*) works as Programme Manager during 2012, handling the day-to-day affairs and planning for the courses in collaboration with Mr. Binit Kumar Mishra (*photo to the left*), Hindi teacher employed on a permanent basis. Mr. Mishra and five other teachers that work on contract basis, have all received pedagogic training in how to teach European students by Dr. Juntunen.



John Moldén has a background from Uppsala University, where he studied Sanskrit, Comparative Indo-European Languages, and Hindi from 2006, and Stockholm University, where he pursued with a masters programme in South Asian Studies from 2010. He was then one of the first participants in the Varanasi Hindi studies programme in 2011, and during the fall 2011 he did an internship as coordinator for the Varanasi programme as part of his MA. Now being the programme manager, John has spent most of the year in Varanasi. (In 2013, he will be succeeded by a Norwegian programme manager).



Conversation class for Peter Aggarwal, with Hindi teacher Punam Mishra.

During the fall 2012, a group of 12 students from Aarhus University spends 14 weeks from September till early December at the Centre. Unfortunately, they were all away on fieldwork on the day when I came to visit. I was however warmly welcomed by John Moldén and his visiting girl friend Elin Bergman, and met the teachers Punam Mishra and Binit Kumar Mishra. Present were, to my great luck, also two Hindi students from Stockholm, Peter Aggarwal and Rainer Haag, who after studying the popular distance education

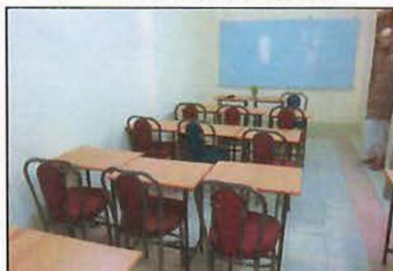
Hindi course at Stockholm University now had come on private basis to Varanasi and the Centre for two weeks of intense Hindi conversation training. They were full of praise for the language training they are offered and the concept of the centre. Peter, whose father hails from India, is working as export manager for the company Interspiro, producing breathing equipment.

The cost for participating in the Varanasi programme is very moderate, 10 000 Indian rupees per week. Cheap accommodation is also offered. The course structure at the Centre for students coming for a semester course is made out of conversation training lessons in the morning, each time focusing on a specific area such as transport, in order that the students later the same day goes out to interview let say a riksha-wallah.

In the afternoons, class room grammar lessons follow, and finally the Centre organises evening seminars with invited speakers, often selected to fit in with the fieldwork themes the students have chosen, be it Kashmir, gender issues or whatever else.

The Centre currently receives students from Aarhus, Oslo, Uppsala and Stockholm. With the changed organisational structure, as a trust independent of the Nordic Centre in India university consortium, the Centre may even approach universities and students from non-Nordic countries.

It should be added that besides courses designed by the Centre, it also offers tailor-made courses planned according to demands from the universities sending students. Advanced Hindi students from different South Asia studies programmes are also invited to stay as trainees at the Centre in order to get experience from course administration plus improve their knowledge of Hindi.



Meeting with Social Sciences faculty at BHU

From the Hindi Centre, located in an ordinary housing colony in central Varanasi, I travelled south to the magnificent campus of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), one of the most historic universities of India. Exactly 10 years ago, in 2002, I visited BHU for the first time – see the SASNET report.



This time I was first invited to meet the faculty and a few students of Social Sciences, in the Lecture Theatre Complex building. The meeting was organised by Professor Ashok Kaul and my host in Varanasi, Professor Dipak Malik, who also has had a long career at BHU. Nearly 20 people turned up to listen to my presentation of SASNET.

The response was high, and many questions arose on possibilities to establish contacts with researchers in Sweden.

List of senior faculty:

- Professor Ashok Kaul, Department of Sociology
- Prof. B N Juyal, Gandhian Institute of Studies
- Prof. A K Jain, Department of Economics
- Dr. C D Adhikary, Department of Sociology



- Dr. Ghan Shyam, Department of History
- Raksh Raman, Department of Economics
- Ranjeena Sheel, Department of History. Interested in gender studies.
- Dr. Muniza R Khan, Gandhian Institute of Studies
- Dr. Manoj Mishra, Malaviya Centre for Peace Research
- Raj Kamal Yadav, Gandhian Institute of Studies



On the way from the faculty meeting, I saw an exhibition in the hallway on Bhojpuri Culture. Professor Sadanand Shahi (*photo*) who is Coordinator for the Bhojpuri Adhyayan Kendra (Bhojpuri Study Centre) also participated in the faculty meeting, now he showed me around the interesting artefacts exhibited on this rather ignored language and people of

Bhojpuri culture, in northeastern Uttar Pradesh. The Bhojpuri Study Centre was created at BHU in 2009 as an extension to its Hindi Department.

Meeting at Malaviya Centre for Peace Research



After lunch I returned to Banaras Hindu University, this

time to the Malaviya Centre for Peace Research (MCPR). It was established in 1997 as an interdisciplinary centre of the Faculty of Social Sciences connecting faculty and researchers from diverse disciplines of the Social Sciences, particularly Political Science and International Relations, working to analyse and contribute to the peaceful resolution of intra- and inter-state conflict.



I was invited by Professor Priyanka Upadhyaya, MCPR coordinator, with several Scandinavian connections, especially with the universities of Oslo, Karlstad, Uppsala and Gothenburg. Two Swedish researchers have spent time at MCPR as Visiting Faculty, Prof. Peter Wallensteen from the Dept. of Peace and Conflict Studies, Uppsala University; and Dr. Marc Katz, Department of Religious Studies, Karlstad University. In 2012, a Linnaeus Palme exchange programme has been established between MCPR and the Department of History and Political Science, also at Karlstad University (*more information*). Prof. Upadhyaya has also visited Lund University in 2009 and held a SASNET lecture (*more information*).

In the summer of 2012, two of the researchers, Ajay Kumar Yadav and Siddharth Singh, participated in a summer school in Norway organised by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), part of University of Oslo. More information.

The meeting started as a usual presentation of SASNET and of the researchers present, but soon turned into a discussion on technical



details regarding SASNET's web site and my experiences of creating a web portal on South Asian studies in Sweden. There was a great interest to make use of these experiences for Malaviya Centre and its web site.

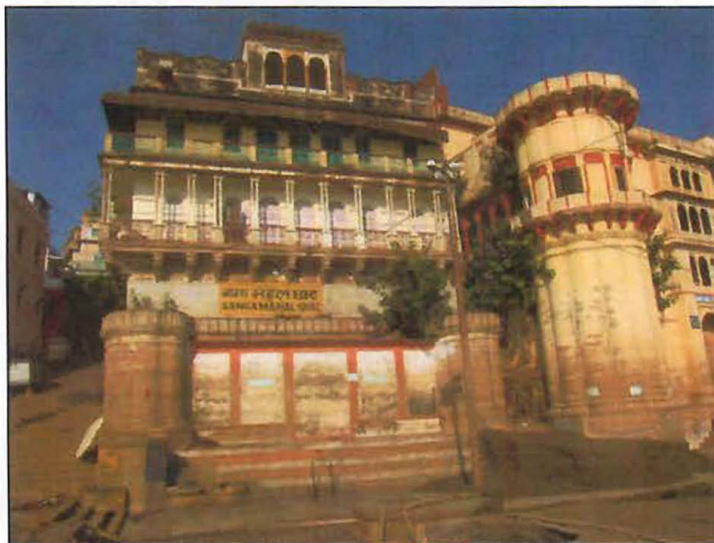
Researchers present:

- Associate Professor Siddharth Singh, Dept. of Pali and Buddhist Studies
- Assistant Professor Manoj Mishra, MCPR
- Visiting faculty Vandana Singh, MCPR

- Research scholar [Gaurav Shah](#), MCPR. Research interest: Media and Inter-Religious Peace Building in India.
- Research scholar [Reena Baral](#), MCPR. Research interest: Conflict and Grievance Handling in Industries: Case Study of Manesar Industrial Belt.
- Research Fellow [Ajay Kumar Yadav](#), MCPR. Research interest: Culture of Governance and Conflict Resolution; Underdevelopment and Democracy.
- Research scholar [Chandra Kishar Mani Pandey](#), MCPR. Research interest: India Peaceful Nuclear Energy and International Perspective.
- Research scholar [Krishna Rai](#), MCPR. Research interest: India's Look East Policy: Historical Analytical View in the special Reference of ASEAN.
- Research scholar [Bhola Nath Gupta](#), MCPR. Research interest: Nonviolent Movements: Gandhian Thought and Current Problem.

Karlstad University Study Centre (Ganga Mahal)

Next morning, on Tuesday 30 October, before proceeding for a 360 km taxi ride from Varanasi to Kanpur along Asian Highway No. 1, I visited the impressive palatial Ganga Mahal building right on the banks of Ganges at Assi Ghat, housing Karlstad University's Study Centre.



It was exactly 10 years since I last visited this centre, rented by Karlstad University from the former Maharaja of Varanasi. [See my report from the 1982 visit.](#)

The main change since last time is the demise of the long time centre director, Om Prakash Sharma, who passed away in 2011. He has now been succeeded by his son, Mr. Rajeev (Raju) Sharma (*photo below*), whom I met in his office at the centre.



In recent years, the centre has mostly catered to Karlstad students in teachers training and from History of Religion and Cultural Geography. It is administered through the India Programme, now coordinated by Dr. Per-Olof Fjällsby from the Department of History and Political Science.

During the fall semester 2012, Ganga Mahal is far from crowded. The main reason is that no students in History of Religion are coming, (but in next fall semester 2013 they

will) which means only a handful students stay at the centre have come to do field work in Varanasi. They are privileged in having the most spectacular view over the River Ganga you could ever imagine in Varanasi from their balcony and roof terrace.

At my visit, I met two teachers training students, both of them in the field of social science who spends the fall semester here. [Victoria Lundin](#), a fourth year student had come to Ganga Mahal for the second time – she had also been here as a student of History of Religion five years ago. Victoria was studying multiculturalism in a project entitled "Communal Harmony: Lessons from Benares".



Juval Pruitt is a third year student, and his Varanasi field work project focuses on how Indian teachers Democracy teaching in the school. *(Victoria and Juval on photo at the balcony)*



Besides the Director, the centre also has a couple of other staff assisting the visiting students with all practical issues. 10 students can be housed in Ganga Mahal, if more are coming the rest will be housed in another house named Amar Bhavan. Since students from Karlstad University do not always fill the centre, it is also open for other Swedish or Nordic universities and institutions to make use of Ganga Mahal if there are free places. Mr. Sharma informed me as an example that in

February 2013 a group from Luleå will come and stay at the centre. The cost for placing a student at Ganga Mahal is about SEK 800 per week.

Aarhus University has also expressed its interest to let their Indology students join Karlstad University's India Programme, that includes studies in Hindi.

Lars Eklund

