



## A brief overview of the research interest and works of Joseph T. O’Connell

South Asia, and especially India, was a life-long interest of Joseph Thomas O’Connell (1940–2012). In his writings, this interest can be documented beginning with his first paper on Gandhi in 1959 until his last essays in the *Bangladesh e-journal of Sociology* in 2011. Even though most of his works in the interim, in line with his doctoral dissertation *Social implications of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava Movement* (1970), focused on various aspects of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava tradition in Bengal, his interests ran much wider, both in terms of religious traditions and geography. In addition to discussions of Chaitanya, the process of the institutionalization of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava movement and its relations to and interactions with other movements, as well as on key terms such as *karman* and ‘Hindu’, he published works on the life and work of Rabindranath Tagore, on the Jain and Sikh traditions, on Hindu–Muslim relationships, on South Asian diasporas, as well as on the study of religion in South Asia.

Joe was, however, not only interested in ‘traditional’ academic textual studies of these issues. He was also keenly interested in questions of the social implications and relevance of the teachings of these traditions and to what extent they had succeeded in translating into changes in the social sphere. He had realized early on that if you should study the ‘value orientation’ of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava, *prema-bhakti* (loving devotion), you could not turn a blind eye to its social impact.

True to his conviction that if one were to make claims about the transformative power of Vaiṣṇava spirituality, then one had to go outside the textual sources and engage in ‘lived religion’, he also several times spent time ‘in the field’ exploring it as participant observer.

In line with the general Indian philosophical stance that serious scholars — especially if they, as Joe, are in the field of religiously inspired ethical living — should ‘live as they learn’, he was also engaged in voluntary communal work

both at home and in South Asia. One example of this is his deep engagement with the University of Dhaka over the last twelve years of his life, where he, despite technically retiring in 2000, spent three months almost every year supporting them in developing, and teaching in, their program on World Religions and Cultures.

Joe O'Connell was a scholar whose interests and intellectual curiosity ranged far and wide and who ceaselessly shared his acquired knowledge and social ethos by teaching courses, writing essays, organizing conferences, editing volumes as well as in practical work in the social world. The world is not the same without him.

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<sup>1</sup> The above list is based on bibliography from: McDermott, R.F. (2012). In Memoriam: Joseph Thomas O'Connell (1940–2012). *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 80(4), 839–847. Retrieved from: <http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org> (30.05.2016).

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