

## OBITUARY

### LYNN TESKEY

7 January 1949 – 1 March 1995

After a BA and MA in anthropology at McMaster University, Ontario, Lynn Teskey came to study social anthropology at Somerville College, Oxford, in October 1973. Already interested in India and Indian religion, she quickly completed the Diploma (the present M.St.) and a library B.Litt. on the Hindu concept of Renunciation. She then settled in Benares and concentrated on female ascetics—a pioneering topic at a time when Gender Studies were in their infancy. A letter from May 1976 well conveys the excitement of early fieldwork, and a later one (October 1977) shows how, with growing proficiency in Hindi, she begins to empathize with her sannyasinis as individuals, as women pursuing a vocation, sometimes in loneliness and squalor, and appreciating the interest even of an outsider. Although the fieldwork was interrupted for a time for medical reasons, she continued doggedly and amassed excellent ethnography from the sacred city, meanwhile enjoying regular conversations with Jonny Parry from LSE, who was working nearby.

Problems increased during the writing up. She was one of the students caught in mid course by the abrupt rise in British university fees during the 1970s, and it was an exhausting struggle for her to assemble the funds, leisure and peace of mind needed for sustained writing. Though suffering from illnesses of many sorts—hepatitis, a car accident that led to expensive surgery, arthritis, a severe migraine condition, and in the end leukaemia—she persisted bravely. Her thesis drafts were scrupulous and polished, and reached the stage at which the appointment of an external examiner could be discussed. Meanwhile she was working at a variety of jobs, most durably in the Department of Religion at Concordia University in Montreal. Her publications represent only a tiny fraction of what she had learned, and she often expressed her sense of frustration at the obstacles preventing completion.

When well, Lynn was a tremendously vigorous and warm personality who made many friends in Oxford, both inside and outside ISCA, during the 1970s and '80s. She was my first Oxford supervisee, but I shall remember her more as a colleague—full of ideas and of enthusiasm for her subject, eager for the latest literature—as she was when our paths crossed in Harvard in 1988. She was by then happily married (as Lynn Teskey Denton), and an exciting academic future seemed to beckon. That was not to be, but the unexpected birth of a daughter brought great joy and fulfilment to her later years.

N. J. ALLEN