

Kathleen Gough
1925-1990



KATHLEEN GOUGH was born in Hunsingore, Yorkshire, England on 16 August 1925, and died in Vancouver, 8 September 1990. Known for her social activism as well as her distinguished scholarship, Gough worked diligently for the rights of women, minorities and the poor of the Third World. She combined this work with significant contributions to knowledge and theory in social anthropology.

Educated at Girton College, Cambridge, she received her B.A. in 1946 and her PhD. in 1950. Her doctoral dissertation "Changes in Matrilineal Kinship on the Malabar Coast" was written under the supervision of John Hutton and Myer Fortes. Gough maintained a life-long interest in South Asian social formations, their continuities, and their transformations under the forces of colonialism. Her main period of field work in India in 1947-53 was followed by other research trips in the 1970s and 80s. Trained during the high-water mark period of structural-functionalism, Gough embodied the best of that much maligned tradition: the discipline of long fieldwork, meticulous data gathering, and careful generalizations. But operating during an era of catastrophic change, she added to her fieldwork agenda the very unBritish and unfunctionalist focus on transformative change in mode of production. Working at the village level, Gough dedicated her ethnographic knowledge to the goal of expanding the options people actually had open to them for empowerment.

Gough taught and conducted research at Harvard, Manchester, Berkeley, Michigan, Wayne State, Brandeis, Oregon, Simon Fraser, Toronto, and The University of British Columbia. Membership in professional organizations included the American Anthropological Association, Royal Anthropological Institute, British Association of Social Anthropologists, Canadian Ethnology Society, Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, and the Canadian Association for Asian Studies. She was elected to The Royal Society of Canada in 1988.

Gough made major contributions to knowledge in several areas: kinship and marriage theory, sociology of underdevelopment in south Asia, and Anthropology and Imperialism.

She is perhaps best known for her pioneering work among the Nayers, an ethnic grouping in Kerala who practiced a form of marital alliance so unusual that learned authorities questioned whether marriage could even be said to exist among them. In a brilliant series of papers Gough showed that indeed a form of marriage could be discerned among the Nayar. Gough's solution of the "Nayar problem" has provided a test case for definitions of marriage and family discussed in virtually every text book in social and cultural anthropology.

Systems of matrilineal descent are found world-wide in about one-quarter of the world's societies. Yet the contours and underlying principles of these kinds of societies had never been systematically examined until Gough, in collaboration with David Schneider, published their monumental "Matrilineal Kinship" (1961). The book charted the variables affecting all unilineal systems and explored the effects of colonialism and industrialization on such systems, thus helping to build an historically-informed and politically relevant theory of kinship.

Moving from Kerala, Gough carried out intensive fieldwork from 1951 to 1953 on the organization of production and caste and class relations in Tanjore villages. This work produced a series of important papers and culminated in two major

monographs: "Rural Society in Southeast India" (1981) and "Rural Change in Southeast India" (1989). Here Gough weaves a synthesis of three discourses on Indian society which are not often articulated: first, the study of caste relations in the context of Hinduism, second the effects of British colonialism on social order and world view, and third the political economy of class and power relations of village India. In a field noted for obscure and abstruse discourse, Gough's writings are a model of clarity. Her emphasis on class, political economy, and the subalterns earned her enormous respect among Indian scholars and social activists but little from the south Asianist academic establishment in the U.S.A.

Her immersion in post-colonial societies undergoing rapid and traumatic change led Gough to question anthropology's traditional methodological focus on equilibrium in small-scale societies. New methods and new subject matters were necessary if anthropology was to remain relevant. In 1968 she published "New proposals for anthropologists", a paper that launched a wide-ranging debate and re-examination of the historical roots of anthropology's links to colonialism and imperialism.

Scholarship and political writing were *only* part of Kathleen Gough's life and work. From the early 1960s on, she was a tireless campaigner in anthropological meetings and many other forums for an end to the Vietnam War. Her principled and outspoken opposition to the war resulted in stormy relations with several University administrations. A still famous disagreement with Simon Fraser University involving eight other faculty led to her resignation and eventual decision not to hold a permanent academic appointment. In spite of enticing offers from a number of institutions, she steadfastly remained an independent scholar for the last decades of her life. One can *only* speculate on the lost opportunities of students to work with her and the ultimate effect on the course of Canadian scholarship to have had such an important anthropological figure for so long on the proverbial sidelines.

Gough's anti-war work kindled her interest in Vietnam, which led to two trips there, and to her books *Ten Times More Beautiful: The Rebuilding of Vietnam* (1978) and *The Political Economy of Vietnam* (1990), the latter appearing *only* weeks before her death. Kathleen was about to embark on a major interdisciplinary study of Vietnamese society in the 1990s when illness intervened. Funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, and involving twenty University of British Columbia faculty and scholars from Hanoi's National Center for the Social Sciences, the entire project is a testimony to the political sensibilities, compassion, and internationalism that were such characteristic parts of Kathleen Gough's identity. Along with her ten books and seventy articles, the U.B.C. Vietnam project will become part of her enduring legacy. A special issue of the Canadian journal *Anthropologica*, with contributions by a number of Asian and North American scholars, will appear in April 1994, devoted to a critical study of Gough's life and work.

She is survived by her husband David Aberle (FRSC), Professor Emeritus, U.B.C., a son Stephen, and two grandchildren.