KATHLEEN GOUGH AND THE INDIAN REVOLUTION[1]

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The loss of Kathleen Gough has created an irreparable void in anthropology and diminished humanity as a whole. A distinguished scholar, great humanist, true internationalist, valiant crusader for the rights of the oppressed and the dispossessed, visionary with abiding faith in the creative potential of humans to build a more humane and caring social order, she was also a very warm-hearted friend to a large number of people across several continents. It was the critical-humanist and emancipatory motif underlying her scholarly praxis that made her creatively unconventional. In her early work on kinship, she was a structural-functionalist who, nevertheless, made extensive use of history and systematically investigated changes in relations of production. It is remarkable that she initially learnt much of her Marxism from the field, first in Kerala and then in Thanjavur and still later from activists in America. Her field work in Kerala and Thanjavur, both strongholds of the communist movement, convinced her that the communists held out the best hope for the poor and the oppressed. As she plunged into more rigorous and systematic studies of the Marxist literature she continued to test her theoretical understandings through an extensive dialogue with a variety of colleagues and, even more significantly, with grass-roots leaders and theoreticians in the field. To Kathleen Gough anthropology was always a praxis, a lived experience and an engagement with and commitment to the people she studied; a detached, value-free and disinterested anthropology held no attraction for her. Her "love affair" with the people of Vietnam is well known; it is less well known that she maintained life-long relationships and correspondence with many in the villages she studied in India as well (including one of her first cooks) and even more with a network of students and colleagues all over the world. I was one of those who had the privilege of enjoying her friendship and periodic correspondence.

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Kathleen Gough's Work on India

During the past four decades Kathleen Gough made important contributions to Indian studies in the areas of kinship, political economy and peasant studies. These have appeared in four books (two of them co-edited with others) and over 40 papers published in a variety of journals, conventional and unconventional. Seventeen of these papers are now chapters in books.

Leaving aside her ground-breaking work on Nayar kinship which is discussed by other writers in this volume, I suggest that her most significant contribution has been toward creating a Marxist anthropology of India. The masterly synthesis of anthropology and Marxism that she created was rooted in an implicit critique of the prevalent "neo-orientalist" metropolitan constructions of Indian and other non-Western societies—a critique that was fully developed later in her seminal work on "Anthropology and Imperialism" (1968). She integrated into her work the best of anthropology both at the level of ethnography and at the level of theory. Her Marxism was itself a synthesis of the works of the great masters, modern political economists such as Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, and the ideas of Marxists in India, China, Vietnam and other Third World countries.

I wish to offer below a brief and preliminary discussion of Kathleen Gough's contribution in two related critical areas within a Marxist anthropology. These are: (1) class, caste and colonialism, and (2) peasant movements.

Class, Caste and Colonialism

Conventional anthropological and sociological discourse, whether evolutionary, structural-functionalist or indological, placed caste at the centre of Indian social structure. Ideology was given a certain primacy, and the different castes were seen as essentially complementary and non-antagonistic, maintaining the functional unity of the village community.

Kathleen was one of the first anthropologists who attempted to understand Indian social structure in terms of class relations and class struggles that she came to see as endemic to Indian society. In one of her early studies of "ethnic" movements in Kerala she observed that conflict between Nayars and Mappila Muslims arose "from their competitive clash of interests in the modern economy. . . . Similar cultural differences are not seen as provoking conflict when the groups involved are not structurally opposed" (Gough 1963:190). Later she plunged head-on into the debate about India's rural class structure and the mode of production in Indian agriculture with particular reference to the question of the class base and class alliances appropriate for the revolutionary movement. Like most Marxists of the 1960s and the 1970s Kathleen developed the view that dependent capitalist development in India was leading to progressive depeasantization and proletarianization, polarization and immiserization of the peasantry. On this analysis was predicated her

optimistic hopes for a socialist revolution in India; "and for two decades," she wrote in her autobiographical note (1989c:3), she "waited in more or less tense expectation of the revolution." More recent work has questioned this analysis and convincingly established the continuing strength of a class of independent peasant holders who have provided the base for a "new agrarianism" or a "new peasant movement" in India (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987; Bouton 1985; Omveldt1988). It must be stated in defence of Kathleen, however, that the polarization-immiserization-radicalism thesis has had greater validity in Thanjavur and other rice regions of south India than in the rest of the country. In any event, her sympathetic description of the miserable lives of the poor has remained unchallenged. Furthermore, no one to date, not even the current advocates of the new economic order, has been able to demonstrate convincingly how the path of dependent capitalist development followed by India can lift the country's poor out of their poverty to any significant extent in the near future.

Kathleen developed a sophisticated view of the linkage between the rural class structure (as of rural poverty and exploitation) and capitalist imperialism, demonstrating such linkage through meticulous and detailed historical studies. In her work on peasant movements she provided a detailed account of the many ways, economic, political and cultural, in which colonialism determined the structure of India's peripheral capitalism and impinged on the lives of the peasantry, impelling them to rebellion. The central place she assigned to subaltern resistance differentiated her from the reductionist view of some dependency theorists, such as Wallerstein, that denies all autochthonous internal logic and dynamics to Indian society.

Use of the class paradigm, however, did not prevent Kathleen from studying caste. Her ethnographic work offers rich descriptions of castes and caste relations including customary systems of reciprocity and redistribution, provision of security and allocation of power. And her analysis and understanding of caste, religion and community and their linkages with class is most sophisticated. Nevertheless, there seems to be something problematic and inadequate about Marxist understanding of caste and communal identities in India and similar phenomena elsewhere. This issue has assumed greater importance more recently. For not only has the communist movement and Marxism failed to strike any deep roots in Indian society, but the most significant struggles of the 1980s and the 1990s that move the hearts of people appear to be those based on caste, religious and communal identities. I have discussed this issue more than once with Kathleen and I know she was also concerned about this. I can do no better than quote from a letter she wrote to me in 1989:

> One factor which has belatedly come home to me is that for most people in most periods, culture and community are more important than is class. So perhaps class struggle is always very intermittent, coming to the fore only in cri-

> ses, while community stability, religious and other symbols and existential beliefs are more significant most of the time. Of course class interacts with these, but I think we Marxists have been too simple minded and crass about the interactions and have not appreciated the deeper structures and meanings of myths, symbols and rituals.
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> Perhaps there cannot be a renewal of revolutionary thought and activity in India unless it is deeply rooted in symbols and spirituality of a kind that can touch the hearts of people of all religions, as Gandhi did. I don't know how one would go about practical field work among workers while introducing these concerns, but I feel sure they are essential. (Gough, 1989)

Peasant Movements

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Kathleen turned her attention to systematic studies of peasant resistance and peasant movements in India (Gough, 1968-69, 1973, 1974). Her first major paper (1968-69) was written against the background of the Vietnam war, significant revolutionary movements all over the Third World, the cultural revolution in China and the most widespread and militant peasant upsurge in India since the early 1950s. I think this paper represents her most optimistic and hopeful assessment of the potential for the Indian revolution and her most enthusiastic endorsement of armed struggle as the correct path toward that revolution.

Drawing on her studies in Kerala and Thanjavur she presented three arguments. First, rural class struggles have been endemic in south Indian regions. She documented this with cases of peasant initiatives undertaken without the help of leaders or parties whose revisionist policies she saw as putting a brake on peasant militancy. She thus brought peasant perspectives and actions into the centre-stage of history, anticipating the perspective of the later subaltern researchers. Secondly, she took issue with the middle-peasant thesis of Alavi and Eric Wolf and argued that in south India the communists predominantly drew their support from agricultural labourers and poor peasants and that it was the revisionist policies of these parties that were suppressing their revolutionary potential. Further, the middle peasant had been knocked out by the increasing polarization of peasant classes. Third, Kathleen criticized the communists' pursuit of the "revisionist" parliamentary path and showed how such a strategy led to the neglect of day-to-day organizational work and to such contradictions as creating coalitions with those who were formerly regarded as class enemies.

My own studies of class struggle and agricultural labour unionization in Kerala and Thanjavur have confirmed that in these regions agricultural labourers and poor peasants have remained the communists' most loyal supporters. However, this has created its own contradictions, and throughout the 1980s the communists have been attempting to widen their support among the middle peasants (and in the case of Thanjavur to the non-Dalit middle

castes) even at the cost of putting a freeze on wage demands. This is because poor peasants and agricultural labourers alone have not been able to provide them a secure and sustainable base. Meanwhile, they also saw the emergence of the populist, multi-class, "new peasant movements" led by non-Marxist organizations. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (Tharamangalam 1986) the whole question of the revolutionary potential of specific social classes is a historical one, relative and changing. Furthermore, in formulating the middle-peasant thesis Alavi and Wolf were discussing the ability of different peasant classes for sustained participation in organized and relatively large-scale military operations whereas Kathleen was talking about peasant participation in trade union activities and agitational methods employed within the framework of parliamentary politics.

Kathleen's later work on peasant movements in India (1974) is, in my view, the first systematic and comprehensive study of peasant movements in colonial and post-colonial India. On the basis of a survey of 77 significant peasant movements she argued quite convincingly that "social movements among the peasantry have been widely prevalent in India during and since the British rule." Since at least 37 of these were by Hindus she doubted whether the caste system could have seriously impeded peasant rebellion in times of trouble. All the peasant movements she considered were class-based, armed struggles against a variety of exploitative and oppressive practices directly or indirectly resulting from the introduction of capitalism and imperialism. Using a variety of concepts from social scientists such as David Aberle as well as from Marxist theory, she classified these into five broad types ranging from restorative rebellions to modern mass insurrections. Contrary to Hobsbawm, Cohn and Worsley who held millenarian movements to be specific to the Judaeo-Christian world, she showed that these were common among Hindus, Muslims and the tribal populations of India.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Tharamangalam 1986), here Kathleen provided a very realistic assessment of Indian revolutionary potential under current conditions, one that was far more sober than before. After examining the conjuncture of historical conditions that favoured the relatively successful revolts she came to the conclusion that "the more recent revolts of the recent period occurred under irregular conditions which are unlikely to be repeated."

Conclusion

Kathleen Gough was committed to and made creative contributions to the development of a critical and emancipatory social science. In the closing years of the 1980s she watched the momentous changes taking place in the world with a combination of despair and hope. She was saddened by the collapse of much of the socialist world and feared that this would cause increased suffer-

ing to the poor of the Third World. But she had also come to the conclusion that centralized bureaucratic states were not adequate to the task of creating true socialism. In some of her last writings (1990a, 1990b) she expressed the hope that the time had come to dissolve the 5000-year-old institution of the state and to move into some kind of a world society. She was optimistic about what she saw as a convergence of a number of promising social movements including the ecology movement and the women's movement.

I believe that a similar convergence of movements is occurring in India too, though these are taking a course different from that predicted by the Marxists. To be sure, religious fundamentalism and communal violence are a source of worry, but very important struggles by the Dalits (the ex-untouchables), tribal people, national minorities and women and a growing movement for the environment do hold considerable potential. Kathleen often spoke of the need for arriving at an adequate theoretical understanding of these processes and issues. "The world," she said in the concluding statement of her last published article (1990b), "is open to new ideas as it has not been for many decades. We have a lot of work to do."

As ex-Christian believers Kathleen and I several times fell into religious discourse, mostly towards the end of other discussions. She always spoke of a deep love as motivating and sustaining her work. I believe and I know that in some indefinable way Kathleen's presence, a presence of extraordinary richness, brilliance and love, is deeply felt among us as we reflect upon the significance of her life and work.

Note

1. This is a revised version of a paper presented at the symposium, "Anthropology, Imperialism and Resistance: The Work of Kathleen Gough," Montréal, May 11, 1992. I wish to thank David Aberle for reading the paper and offering his helpful comments.

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