

## Ellen McDonald Gumperz

### 1936–1972

The death of Ellen McDonald Gumperz in the midst of her period of mature scholarship and professional recognition was a loss not only to John Gumperz, her family, children and friends, but to those working in the many areas her studies probed. Her last research touched two of her basic interests: the area of Maharashtra in India and the structure of nineteenth century modernization. A planned study of communications systems was frustrated by her illness and by the paucity of local records. However, she left a number of studies which reveal a fine analytical mind and a lucid writing style and which break new ground in examining structures and in using modern quantitative methods in Indian history.

Ellen McDonald Gumperz's work forces a reevaluation of the old generalizations regarding the presumed monolithic nature of the content and impact of education upon Indian society. It questions the validity of an urban-rural dichotomy in society and economy. It cautions against the automatic acceptance of caste or community as determinative factors conditioning behavior as against family, locality or the structure of economic opportunity. It stresses the vital role of communication for promoting new patterns in the social and economic order. Even when all of her extant writings are published, her contributions will not be fully defined, for she stimulated important work such as the compilation of a number of time series of quantitative data for the Maharashtra region and the integration of social science insights in the analysis of premodern Maharashtra. Her incisive logic was often felt in conferences on Asian studies and in conversations with her fellow scholars.

After securing a B.A. at Cornell and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of California at Berkeley, Ellen McDonald Gumperz taught briefly at Columbia University, California State College at Haywood and from 1969 in the Integrated Social Science Program at Berkeley. She was politically and administratively active in developing a child care program and in organizing university women faculty. As a teacher as well as a scholar, she combined techniques from various disciplines and methodologies to create fresh and exciting learning situations. Her brief eight years of active scholarship will continue to influence the writing of Indian history.

ELEANOR ZELLIOT  
*Carleton College*  
FRANK CONLON  
*University of Washington*

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