

**Veena Das**

**Doctor of Science**

**Durham Cathedral, 27 June 2018**

Anthropology is often referred to as philosophy with the people in. Professor Veena Das has connected fine-grained ethnographic observations with broader philosophical questions which show us how we make our lives habitable in the face of precarious conditions. To Veena Das, anthropology is not only a scientific endeavour but also a matter of connectedness, a personal engagement with the world. What has animated her unparalleled contribution to Anthropology is how to prepare ourselves to receive knowledge that stands somewhat outside our received templates - call it the knowledge of the other. Her scholarship within Anthropology has travelled widely examining in the process rituals, myths, violence, state, language, sexuality, law, public health not as separate domains but how they are intertwined with each other in the everyday.

In her late twenties she wrote her seminal book *Structure and Cognition* (1977) which examined 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century textual practices through which innovations and claims to new status is made. Her turn to the Anthropology of violence occurs as a responsiveness to a crisis. In 1984 the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguard and as a result there followed violent reprisal attacks on various Sikh communities in India. These events were captured by Veena Das in her moving and memorable books *Mirrors of Violence* (1990). In her second single-authored book *Critical Events* (1995) she addressed the role of the state and the sexual violation during the horrific violence of the Partition of India of 1947, the Bhopal disaster and the limits of toxic tort litigation, and other events that marked important transitions in the formation of the state and the contestation over its sovereign power. These accounts were brought to the surface by communities among whom she was working, in the aftermath of the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. In due course she bravely testified against the perpetrators of these riots. She has changed our understanding of the Anthropology of Violence through three ground-breaking collaborative publications: *Social Suffering*; *Violence and Subjectivity*;



