

## OBITUARY

### **Mrs. Nancy Hatch Dupree (1927-2017)**

As one browses through our advisory panel list in our website of [www.ruralsouthasia.org](http://www.ruralsouthasia.org) we come across one scholarly name of Late Ms. Nancy Hatch Dupree in the advisory body of Rural South Asia. When Rural South Asia was taking its formative shape in 2013, that time we were



communicating with scholars in different parts of South Asia who had their scholarly works on rural aspects of South Asian societies. It was decided that from every nation of South Asian sub-continent or Indian sub-continent we must have one scholar in our research and academic advisory board panel as an advisory. We approached then different scholars, who had distinctive research and academic works to their credit, and they were invited to be part of our advisory body. I as coordinator of the web-portal personally began searching for scholars. For Afghanistan it was a tenacious drive and I wrote to many of the scholars whom I felt worth to be part of our network. However, some gave replies with apologies of not joining some could not reply at all. So, it was almost in April, 2013 the task which was started remained dormant for another quarter of a year. Surprisingly, in August, 2013 I got reply from Nancy, she wrote: “Dear me! Somehow your kind letter in April became buried and has now just surfaced. I am honored that you thought of me. I do apologize profusely. I expect it is much too late for me to add ....”, her reply was like light after a long terrifying tunnel. Since then, she was always prompt and encouraging in her replies to me. Initially through the Rural South Asia network we wanted to publish a book and then in pre-zoom and pre-Google meet era, she responded to many of our ideas and propositions and gave us valuable advice. So, initially the plan of book on Rural South Asia was transformed into a Journal which was christened as ‘Rural South Asian Studies Journal’, for volume 1 of the Journal she gave her valuable article also titled: ‘Rural Society in Afghanistan’ [Weblink: <http://ruralsouthasia.org/rural-south-asian-studies1/>]. Eventually as our website got launched her profile which she herself edited and approved got uploaded in our website too. There was an air of parental care the way she communicated and steered any communication with us. Her sense of perfection and meticulous approach for research writing we also experienced as she contributed to our journal. Although we could never meet in person during our communication from 2013 to 2017, yet, through her emails she always supported our every new step and she encouraged us always with her ideas and vision. She truly supported the cause of diverse and interactive dialogues among the cultures of South Asia.

Mrs. Nancy H. Dupree was a scholar who devoted her entire life for cause of cultural education and research in Afghanistan. In one of our communications, she shared with me news about her receiving the ‘Sir Percy Sykes Memorial Award’ medal bestowed by the Royal Society of Asian Affairs in London, in January 2014. Her agility to work and warmth to share was truly inspiring. Thus, she not only inspired generations of scholars and learners but equally influenced the policy

makers and statespersons to restructure their policies for educational reforms and developments in Afghanistan. Irrespective of the political turmoil in Afghanistan she continued to work and safeguard many of the archeological treasure of Afghan history and heritage.

Mrs. Nancy Shakuntala Hatch Dupree<sup>1</sup> was her full name 'Shakuntala' an add in her name perhaps given by her mother was inspired from the mythology of Mahabharata of Indian legends. Nancy Dupree was born on October, 3<sup>rd</sup> 1927 as Nancy Hatch in Cooperstown, New York to her mother Emily Gilchrist Hatch, a former actress, and Duane Spencer Hatch an agriculture scientist. Mr. Duan established a rural demonstration centre at Martandum that is still thriving in Kerala, India. In early 1920's and 1930's when Mr. Spencer came to work with Maharaja of Travancore in Travancore (Now in Kerala state of India) carrying out rural development work for Maharaja in the Travancore state, then under the British imperial rule. That is the time when Mrs. Nancy's mother Emily an artists herself joined her husband in India and got drawn to Indian art while her stay with her husband and new born children she did Ph.D. on Kathakali an Indian dance form. Thus, with influence of father who was a dedicated rural development professional and a mother into arts and aesthetics as a child young Nancy got profusely imbibed in Indian and South Asian culture. Later for higher education she went to USA and after return from India, young Nancy attended high school in Mexico and later graduated from Barnard College in 1949. She then went to Columbia University to study Chinese. She did her master's in Chinese Art at Columbia University, but her life was predominantly guided by her passion for South Asia in an inexorable manner.



Mrs. Nancy Hatch and Prof. Louis Dupree in Afghanistan in late 1970's

After completing her studies at Columbia University in New York, she also worked in villages in Mexico and Costa Rica, Sri Lanka, North India around New Delhi and Pakistan. She was first married to an American intelligence officer, Alan D. Wolfe in 1952, who was posted in Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka), she later moved with Mr. Wolfe to Pakistan, and finally came to Afghanistan in 1962. There she met her future husband Prof. Louis Dupree and her passion for Afghanistan which continued for her rest of the life. Together with Prof. Dupree whom she married in 1966, they created a large repository of works and research on culture of Afghanistan. Louis Dupree was a renowned archeologist on Afghanistan's archeology and was a special archeologist of the 'Archeological Survey of Afghanistan' and an AUFS (American University Field Staff) scholar. During their association from 1966 to 1989 till the death of Louis in Durham North Carolina, they both collected and documented various aspects of history and heritage of Afghanistan. Their love for Afghan culture was not just limited to gather and document the heritage collection. Together they wrote several books and developed several rural libraries in Afghanistan to promote their culture and heritage among the generations to come. Moving to Afghanistan in 1962, Mrs. Dupree picked up her passionate love for history and wrote five guidebooks for the

<sup>1</sup> As per The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/sep/17/nancy-hatch-dupree-obituary>

Afghan Tourist Organization while her archaeologist husband. While Prof. Louis Dupree, excavated pre-historic sites in Afghanistan. After demise of Prof. Louis Dupree in 1989, Mrs. Dupree got associated to several organization for the cultural preservation of Afghanistan among them were Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief's (ACBAR) Resource and Information Center (ARIC). This was also the time of political turmoil in Afghanistan when civil war ensued, and Mrs. Dupree could not go to Afghanistan frequently. Through ARIC she initiated a popular project that supplies reading materials to villages, districts, and public libraries inside Afghanistan, as well as to refugee schools in Pakistan. Mrs. Dupree was also involved with the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH). From 1989 till her last moments, she published over 250 pieces on a wide variety of topics relating to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. In 2007 she founded Louis and Nancy Hatch Dupree Foundation, where she brought tangible heritage, scholars, and learners of Afghan culture together. Her professional working title till 2017 was the Executive Coordinator of the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU). She was hugely respected and loved by the people of Afghanistan who all could come in contact with her. Although an American by birth she was truly an Afghan in her spirit who gave her entire life and agile spirit for the culture and heritage of Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan who love her most often say... that Nancy lives in heart of people of Afghan land, and so does breadth her last on September, 10<sup>th</sup> 2017 in Kabul, Afghanistan. As quoted from Shoaib Sharifi's obituary; 'As the Afghan proverb goes: "Nancy has been framed in the mirror of our hearts..." and will remain there forever and Afghans will not forget her. She has passed away, but her spirit will guide many bright young Afghans to follow the path and make Afghanistan once again a great country'.

***Some of her major books are as follows:***

1. *The Valley of Bamiyan* (1963, Nancy Hatch Wolfe; 2nd ed; revised ed, 2002)
2. *Historical Guide to Kabul* (1965; Nancy Hatch Wolfe; 2nd ed. 1972; later pirated. edition)
3. *Herat: A Pictorial Guide* (1966; Nancy Hatch Wolfe; pirated edition 2001)
4. *An Historical Guide to Afghanistan* (1970; revised and enlarged ed. 1997, Japanese edition, 1974)
5. *The National Museum of Afghanistan* (1974)
6. *Afghanistan Through the Eyes of Pakistani Cartoonists* (1994)
7. *Over a Cup of Tea: 46 chronicles (essays) 1995-2007 (2009) 2<sup>nd</sup> enlarged edition: 58 chronicles 1995-2010 (2011)*



Mrs. Nancy Dupree in the stacks at the ACKU and with young people at ACKU

Image credit: Joel van Houdt

**OBITUARY WRITTEN BY BINA SENGAR**