



## Mario Rutten (1958–2015)

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## OBITUARY

### Mario Rutten (1958–2015)

How does one sum up a life—a life full of tolerance, scholarship, hope and optimism suddenly cut short by a nasty and insidious disease that showed no mercy for its host? All of us who knew Mario Rutten, as friends, students and colleagues, are pondering this same conundrum—why does it always seem to be the good people who die young? Born in Maastricht on 31 October 1958, Mario spent his childhood with his siblings in various towns and cities of the Netherlands due to his father's employment. In 1984 he completed his MA degree in sociology from Erasmus University Rotterdam, with specialisation in Organisation Sociology, Management and Comparative/Non-Western Sociology. In 1991 he completed his PhD degree *cum laude* (with distinction) in the Social Sciences (Anthropology/Sociology) at the University of Amsterdam with a dissertation titled 'Capitalist Entrepreneurs and Economic Diversification: Social Profile of Large Farmers and Rural Industrialists in Central Gujarat, India'.

In the 1980s Mario had begun a serious study of India, and in particular of Gujarat: first during his MA research when he was based at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, and second for his doctoral studies, funded by the Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) where he was an affiliated researcher at the Centre for Social Studies, Surat. Between 1992 and 1997, the comparative side of Mario's training and scholarship shone through; he was appointed as a postdoctoral researcher funded by the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences in the Netherlands (KNAW) to conduct a comparative study of agricultural and industrial entrepreneurs in the countryside of South and Southeast Asia, based on fieldwork in Gujarat (west India), Central Java (Indonesia) and the state of Kedah (north Malaysia). Upon completing his postdoctoral research, Mario rapidly rose up the academic ladder, with various senior research posts at, for instance, the Centre for Asian Studies, Amsterdam (CASA), the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies (NIAS), and as the head of the Amsterdam branch of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). From 2000, he was appointed lecturer, then in the same year associate professor, at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, and in 2002 was appointed professor in Comparative Sociology of Asia at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and concurrently as the director of the Platform ASiA (Asian Studies in Amsterdam) of the University of Amsterdam.

Over the past three decades, the number of projects and publications (in both Dutch and English), let alone Masters and PhD supervision, courses taught, reviews conducted, senior management posts (e.g. chair of the Scientific Committee of KITLV—Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies—from 2006 to 2012), and international seminars and lectures held would run to several dozen pages. To say that Mario Rutten was a workaholic would be an understatement; but in saying this, all of those who knew him would agree that Mario was one of the most sincere, helpful, and

down-to-earth people that one could ever know. Although a 'highly esteemed' professor, he valued the training of undergraduate and graduate students above all else, and never shied away from teaching first year students and engaging them in lively debate and discussion. He was not one for the 'airs and graces' of professor-dom, and over the years he welcomed an innumerable number of guests into his home, helped the various visitors with settling in Amsterdam, and after their stays of varying lengths, inevitably saw them off with his humour, wit and charm at Schiphol Airport. He was the true anthropologist, one who could equally engage with the elite as well of those from varying social backgrounds.

Apart from his enormous academic endeavours and contribution over the years, Mario was also engaged in ethnographic film-making and photography—his personal quest to bring the complexity of everyday lives into public view. Following on from one of his major research projects on the migration of the Indian diaspora, the film *Living Like a Common Man* documents the everyday lives of Gujarati youth in London (<https://sites.google.com/site/livinglikeacommonman/>). Together with his brother, the photographer Huib Rutten, Mario produced a photo exhibition, and later book, entitled *Globalisation in Mirror Images: Westernisation in India, Easternisation in the Netherlands*. The photographs aim to show how Westernisation in India and Easternisation in the Netherlands are two sides of the same coin of globalisation. The photographs were displayed at exhibitions in Amsterdam (2008) and The Hague (2009), along with a large number of lectures in the Netherlands and India (<http://www.provglo.org/photo-album/111>). His last book was a collection of observations and anecdotes about his various anthropological encounters, bringing a human side to the everyday encounters with 'ordinary' people he (and his family) met, 'encountered' and researched over the years (<http://aissr.uva.nl/news/item/anthropological-encounters.html>). One of his last published journal articles was in fact in this journal, *South Asia: 'A Global Town in Central Gujarat, India: Rural–Urban Connections and International Migration'* (with Sanderien Verstappen), Vol. 38, no. 2 (July 2015), pp. 230–45.

Personally, my last recollection of Mario was in Amsterdam in October 2015. Along with my wife, Ruchira, we were sitting together with his wife in his small Amsterdam flat (his city 'pad'; his family home being in Almere) and discussing ill-health—what else! Mario was still somewhat optimistic, and considering he had lost twenty kilograms in weight, he was looking relatively well and still riding a bicycle. The oesophageal cancer he had been diagnosed with in early April, but which ominously had spread to his liver, seemed to be under control, but it was an illusion. A mere two months later, in the early morning of 26 December 2015, Professor Mario Rutten—friend, husband, father, scholar and mentor, died. He will be so sadly missed by many South and Southeast Asian academics and, by all of us who knew him personally, never forgotten. Mario is survived by his wife and long-time soulmate Rienke, and their two children, Daan and Lisa.

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