

Political Sociology in India and perhaps his most significant work, *Interrogating Caste; Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian society*. He has edited a volume on social stratification which includes papers from some of the pioneering scholars in the field. He edits the prestigious journal *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. His sweep is broad and he has successfully spanned the entire gamut relating to the transformation of Indian society, its plurality and diversity, commitment to egalitarianism and the constant churning in society for redefining social and cultural boundaries which change has necessitated.

Professor Dipankar Gupta regards his student days in the Delhi School as heady and recalls the thrill of being taught by a galaxy which included M.N.Srinivas, J.P.S. Oberoi, and Andre Beteille. It is there that he discovered a certain enthusiasm for sociology and this has stayed with him. Despite the first uncertain years after his studies he says: "I do not think I would have been happy in any other profession" and adds that he considers himself fortunate since "I knew what I wanted to become when I was roughly nineteen years old". Apart from those who taught him in the Delhi School he found in Professor Yogendra Singh, his doctoral supervisor, just the gentle guru he needed. And I.P.Desai, with whom he worked early in his career, was another significant influence. Both, he acknowledges, were sources of great intellectual strength. His years in JNU, where he has spent the best part of his professional life, have been tranquil and happy and he has benefited from the interaction he has with his pupils and colleagues. Happily married, he admits with becoming scholarly modesty that his wife Harmala has a literary standard which although he aspires to, he has not been able to achieve.

The Malcolm Adiseshiah Award, instituted by the Malcolm and Elizabeth Adiseshiah Trust and administered by the Madras Institute of Development Studies, commemorates Dr Malcolm Adiseshiah's life-long commitment to promote research of high quality in the social sciences, in the area of development studies in particular. It is also a remembrance of the encouragement he steadfastly provided to young scholars.

The first award (2001) was presented to Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee, MIT, USA, the second (2002) to Bina Agarwal, IEG, Delhi and the third (2003) to Jandhyala B. G. Tilak, NIEPA, New Delhi.

The jury for the fourth award consisting of Professor Andre Beteille, Professor K. N. Panikkar and Professor K. L. Krishna has unanimously recommended that the award for 2004 be conferred upon Professor Dipankar Gupta.

Professor Dipankar Gupta has contributed significantly to our knowledge of the intricacies of social stratification in India. Using a fine blend of theory and carefully marshalled empirical evidence his work has opened new vistas. The award is a just recognition of his efforts to analyse India's plurality and diversity.

**Malcolm & Elizabeth Adiseshiah Trust
Madras Institute of Development Studies**

Second Main, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, Chennai 600 020 • www.mids.ac.in

Malcolm Adiseshiah Award 2004

Presented to
Dipankar Gupta
Professor
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi

A Profile

Dipankar Gupta, professor in the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, has been unanimously nominated to receive the Malcolm Adiseshiah Award for Distinguished Contributions to Development Studies for 2004. The nomination was made by an independent jury in recognition of Professor Gupta's incisive inquiries into the structure of society and social change in India.

Educated in the Delhi School of Economics and JNU from where he obtained his master's and doctoral degrees respectively, Dipankar Gupta has earned for himself a well justified reputation as a sociologist deeply committed to an objective inquiry into the complexities of India's social structure. In doing so he has illuminated aspects of India's society which have so far been influenced excessively by what he calls the textbook view which is often contradicted by ground realities. A notable characteristic of his work is the manner in which he blends scholarship with a firm commitment to reaching beyond the reality captured, at best partially, by textual notions. In an early attempt Dipankar Gupta examined the nexus between the Varna and Jati models as also that between the evolution of the caste system and the Asiatic mode of production. Departing from the line of inquiry advocated by scholars of eminence he broke fresh ground by arguing that the Jati model could not be understood without analyzing Varna and further that the two are "reflective of specific socio-economic formations, and that the origins of the caste system should be sought in the material history of India and not in the empyreal recesses of the Hindu

mind". In a broad sense his other and more detailed studies of caste in India have followed this trajectory.

An important anchor for his contributions is the distinction he makes between hierarchy and difference. The two should be considered together but at the same time be treated as separate concepts. Following from this Dipankar Gupta remarks that it is necessary to look at castes as discrete categories, which allow for the formulation of multiple hierarchies. In his words, "differences dominate the articulation of a hierarchy in the caste system". And "sociologists of social stratification quite uncritically tend to assume that all forms of stratification must necessarily be hierarchical in character. Perhaps a conscious awareness of the logical properties of hierarchy and difference will preempt such errors and allow for a more systematic exposition of the basic principles that underpin the sources of continuity and change in diverse systems of social stratification".

In attempting to probe into the nature and dynamics of caste in India Dipankar Gupta has charted new paths, which have led to demystifying the system's apparently unchanging rigidity. He has meticulously documented cases which serve to demonstrate that no caste, regarded however lowly by others, is content to accept its status unquestioningly. More importantly virtually every caste has a tale to narrate about its origins. Also while rebelling against the low status it is accorded its members are quite prepared to endorse the low caste status of another. While dealing with the disjunction between the book and the ground view Dipankar Gupta speaks felicitously of the 'great gulf between orthopraxy and orthodoxy' and remarks that this is where the 'invention of tradition' makes its entry. Its impact is seen in the way in which emergent practices, which become necessary as a result of contingent

factors are given justification in the name of tradition. It is this, which leads him to conclude that "caste politics and mobilisations in India today force traditional forms of thought to yield new meanings in order to justify social action dictated by contemporary secular interests". This is what makes possible apparently improbable political alliances. Empirical proof is adduced by reference to election results in three regions of India and comparing them with caste figures. Tellingly he poses the question: "If caste loyalties are so unswerving and rigid as they are claimed to be then surely they should manifest themselves in elections", and adds that there is little evidence of such correlation although popular belief insists that it is so.

Another significant contribution of his relates to the issue of caste and race. He points to one feature which distinguishes them. While colour complex in race is ideologically driven by whites from above, in the case of caste the notion of purity-pollution and of multiple hierarchies has several points of generation. Rather poignantly but realistically he adds that black politics is becoming obsolete but caste politics shows little sign of 'ennui or decay'. He has also made an incisive comparative analysis of affirmative action and positive discrimination and situates this within the larger framework of the American and Indian attitudes towards the individual and the community.

These seminal writings apart Dipankar Gupta has to his credit one of the early analyses of the rise and growth of the Shiv Sena, which formed the subject of his doctoral thesis. His contributions to sociological research in the context of India's social stratification, socio-cultural plurality and diversity are rich and wide-ranging. Among them the following may be specially mentioned: *Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*,