



## **Colloquium Series: Placing the Garden Variety under the Lens**

Speaker:

Probal Dasgupta, Professor and Head, Linguistic Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

Date / Time:

September 6, 2012 - 3:45pm - 5:30pm

Venue:

10th Floor, Auditorium, Pixel A, APU

Abstract:

Development and education stand to benefit from serious advances in social inquiry – if they occur. The fact that the rise of the state and the rise of writing are the same historical curve described from distinct and fragmentary viewpoints might serve as an obvious starting point if social inquiry had been a planetary enterprise. But it is in fact national; and social inquiry in the Indian republic is based on an emulation model. Our spontaneous self-deprecation describes emulative practices in terms of practical and conceptual dependence on Anglo-America; upscaling this discourse to a potentially theory-anchored level of self-criticism, an upscaling undertaken in my 1993 book *The Otherness of English*, is not a project that can succeed in isolation.

In the present intervention Prof. Dasgupta outlines the garden variety scrutiny project, a larger project within which both in his 1993 book and its 2011 methodological sequel *Inhabiting Human Languages* can be contextualized. The social inquiry disciplines, he argues, take as their actual point of departure the codification of the garden that has been enclaved out of the jungle. Each discipline picks out an instantiation of the garden and adopts the working hypothesis that the corresponding jungle is the codified garden writ large, observing broadly garden-like laws. Thus, anthropology is religion writ large; linguistics, political science, economics, sociology are respectively grammar, the lawbook, book-keeping, market surveys writ large. So framed, the social inquiry disciplines survey their jungles and keep looking for garden variety phenomena, which they regard as reassuring defaults. They classify other varieties on the basis of this default setting. Sounds like a harmless and convenient methodology? But in fact this is where all the chauvinisms, all the essentialisms quietly lurk in the intellectual architecture of what passes for neutral, dispassionate inquiry. To combat these essentializations, to arrive at truly neutral standpoints as a basis for equitable arrangements, is the task for social inquiry. Those of

us who work for the applied disciplines – development, education – are in fact on the frontline. The historical record shows that applicers have always had to stay several steps ahead of the supposedly logically prior conceptual principles that applications are believed to draw upon. Does the work of recasting the pure-applied relation itself (as in David Bleich's 1988 book *The Double Perspective: Language, Literacy, and Social Relations*) fall within our project of scrutinizing the garden variety inquiry? Come to the talk and find out. Meanwhile – to close the circle of this abstract – note that the dependence of a peripheral Indian English on a central Anglo-America instantiates the garden-jungle geometry at the heart of social inquiry as it is practised.

A Note on the Speaker:

Dr. Probal Dasgupta is Professor and Head, Linguistic Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata. His areas of specialization include Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Discourse, Pragmatics, Field Linguistics, Cognitive Linguistics and Philosophy of Language. His publications include *The Otherness of English: India's Auntie Tongue Syndrome* (1993), *After Etymology* (2000) and *Inhabiting Human Languages: the Substantivist Visualization* (2012).