



O.P. Jindal Global University
A Private University Promoting Public Service

JINDAL SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY

OPEN LECTURE SERIES

Wednesday, 9 March 2016, 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

T2, Conference Room IIIrd Floor

O.P. Jindal Global University

Sonapat Narela Road, Sonapat- 131001, Haryana



**Jindal School of Government
and Public Policy**
India's First Public Policy School

“THE POLITICS OF THE POOR: NEGOTIATING DEMOCRACY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA”



SPEAKER

Dr. Indrajit Roy
ESRC Future Research Leader
University of Oxford

Dr. Indrajit Roy is ESRC Research Fellow at Wolfson College/ Department of International Development, University of Oxford. He focuses on the political sociology of transition in the Global South. He has published with the Journal of Peasant Studies, World Development, Contributions to Indian Sociology and Oxford Development Studies. As a recipient of the ESRC Future Research Leader Fellowship, Indrajit has embarked on a new study of the migration of ideas, identities and practices.

Abstract

Over 1.6 billion people in the world live in poverty. Of them, close to a billion inhabit democracies. They challenge the long-dominant assumption in academia that poor people are incapable of and therefore unsuited for democracy. What does living in a democracy mean for impoverished residents of democracies, people who simultaneously confront persistent deprivations and increasing inequalities but are also promised a share in political participation? Do they absorb the universalistic ideas associated with democracy? Or, do their precarious lives overwhelm them so much so that they cannot act beyond particularistic concerns? Do the opportunity structures provided by democracy enthrall their political participation? Or, do the oppressive relations of power to which they are subject restrain them? These questions motivate Roy's study.

Drawing diverse sorts of data, including fieldwork in India, Roy argues that poor people neither assimilate into the universal values associated with democracy nor do they maintain their difference vis-à-vis democracy. Rather, they negotiate with democracy in multi-faceted ways. Their negotiations combine supplications to powerful patrons, demands to implement existing policies, disputes with elected politicians, and imagining an egalitarian society. These practices outlast electoral cycles and participation in protest movements. They involve provisional transactions between contingent collectives of poor people on the one hand and politicians, bureaucrats and members of the dominant classes on the other. The political thoughts and practices entailed in such practices reveal the entanglements between universal values and particularistic ideas, persuading him of the need to overcome unhelpful binaries entailed in such formulations as co-optation and resistance, consent and conflict, and assimilation and difference. To investigate these entanglements, Roy draws on critical political theorists to elaborate an agonistic approach to studying democracy. Such an approach helps him to conceptualise democracy beyond the Liberal paradigm dominant in most writings on the topic.

In drawing on and further developing an agonistic approach, Roy attends to the empirical heterogeneities in poor people's negotiations. Such negotiations are assertive and confident in some cases while meek and reticent in others. Not only do these vary across localities, but also within them. Roy explains these variations by directing attention to the dynamic intersection of opportunity structures and social relations of power. Roy analyses these intersections between opportunity structures and social relations of power as 'political spaces' that both enable and constrain popular practices. Through his examination of the 'political spaces' available to the poor in four different localities, Roy outlines a new analytic framework to understanding poor people's politics.

RSVP: Ms. Hemlata Varma, Dy. Manager & Programme Coordinator, JSJP, +91 8930110724, hvarma@jgu.edu.in



Jindal Global Law School
India's First Global Law School



Jindal School of International Affairs
India's First Global Policy School



**Jindal School of
Liberal Arts & Humanities**
India's First Transnational Humanities School