**Epidemics and Privacy**

This talk will examine conflicts of issues of privacy, confidentiality and the role of the state in the context of epidemics and the provisions within the Epidemic Diseases Act. Epidemics are population-level events in contrast to illnesses that only involve individuals; therein lies the uniqueness of the intersection between medical privacy and public health ethics. The state has unique responsibilities to detect, diagnose, manage and control epidemics. This has local/regional and international ramifications. Also linked to these are limits to the powers, rights of individuals and the extent to which such rights may need to be suspended. The exercise of actions within the Act is not necessarily bereft of infringement of privacy and overt discrimination. Certain diseases, as indeed limitations imposed by the state, have elements of stigma that further confound the fuzziness of this debate. Some of the challenges that need to be considered include:

* Are ‘good’ reasons ‘sufficient’ to generate consensus cutting across cultural differences and class deprivations?
* Can global goals/requirements overwhelm local systems?
* Do state actors resort to coercion and pressure in enforcing these regulations?
* Do global health bureaucracies share as much responsibility as the local ones?
* What lessons do recent epidemics such as Plague, SARS and Influenza offer?

These are critical issues to take into account, particularly in the context of globalisation and increased population movements.

*Rajib Dasgupta*

*Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*