



Tapan Mitra

July 18, 1948 – February 3, 2019

Tapan Mitra, Goldwin Smith Professor of Economics, passed away in Ithaca on February 3, 2019. A prolific researcher, he was a leading mathematical economist of his generation: duly acknowledged for his high standards of scholarship, a rare analytical power, and a fascinating range. He joined the Cornell faculty in 1981 and made a lasting impact on the academic program of the field of economics as a teacher, mentor, administrator and benefactor.

Professor Mitra was born on July 18, 1948 in Kolkata, India. He earned a B.A. degree with first class honors in Economics standing first in the university from Presidency College, Kolkata, in 1968. He joined the Delhi School of Economics and completed his M.A. in Economics with a first in first class. He received his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Rochester in 1973. Before coming to Cornell, he taught at the University of Rochester, the University of Illinois, Chicago, and the State University of New York, Stony Brook. He held visiting appointments at the London School of Economics and Political Science (1982), the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (1986), and the University of Pennsylvania (1987).

Professor Mitra made definitive contributions to the literature on efficiency and equity of intertemporal allocation of resources. His ability to grasp the basic structure of an economic model and to construct and restructure long and intricate chains of reasoning enabled him to move seemingly effortlessly from one research topic to another including, among others, the role of prices in achieving social goals in a decentralized economy; the complex and chaotic nature of evolution of an economy; renewable and exhaustible resources, their sustainability and extinction; choice of techniques in development planning; forestry management; and representation of preferences over time. He had the talent to explore challenging issues that he identified as fundamental, irrespective of whether or not these were topical or popular. With his rigor and precision, he was able to redefine the frontiers of the topics that he touched, often through clear and thoughtful examples and counterexamples.

Professor Mitra served on the editorial boards of several journals, including *Economic Theory* and *International Journal of Economic Theory* at their inception.

He held an Alfred P. Sloan Fellowship from 1981-83. He was elected a Fellow of the Econometric Society in 1997 and a Fellow of The Society for The Advancement of Economic Theory in 2017.

Professor Mitra was a gifted teacher and mentor at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. For years, he taught some of the "core" courses on microeconomics and mathematical methods in the graduate program, and the basic microeconomics course for undergraduate majors. He was particularly appreciated for his thorough and impeccable organization of the material, his clarity of presentation, and a high level of scholarship. Several eminent Cornell graduate students continued fruitful collaboration with him and sought his advice and guidance throughout their careers. To celebrate his sixtieth birthday, his colleagues and collaborators around the world participated in a conference at Cornell in July 2008. The proceedings of the conference were published in 2010 as a special issue of *International Journal of Economic Theory* on growth, sustainability and equilibria. Despite failing health, he remained active in several projects till the end. The gathering at Cornell in 2018 to mark his seventieth birthday was a testament to his life-long passion for exploration.

Professor Mitra served as the chair of the Department of Economics over the periods 1993-1998 and 1999-2002. He also served as the director of graduate studies in the field of economics for the years 2005-2010. His love for the department was underscored towards the end of his career by his generous endowment of the Tapan Mitra prizes for graduate and undergraduate students. The endowment, in his words, was a "concrete expression of my continuing attachment to this great institution of learning."

He was attached to his students and colleagues, and his departure is a great loss to Cornell and to the economic theory community.

Written by Mukul Majumdar (chair), Kaushik Basu, and Larry Blume