

## AWARD

### International Humanitarian Award: Gargi Roysircar



#### Citation

“For her significant contributions to international mental health practice and assessment, particularly in disaster-affected communities, Gargi Roysircar has enriched our understanding of cultural identities and contextual trauma and resilience of nationalities. Her research on immigrant and refugee experiences challenges psychologists to expand their own awareness and consider the international implications of their work. Gargi Roysircar has participated in mental health counseling in postearthquake Haiti; tsunami-affected Southern India; the United States Gulf Coast following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; Tabasco, Mexico, following Hurricane Dean; and for HIV/AIDS-infected and affected children and women in South Africa and Botswana. She is an outstanding mentor to her students, many of whom are now cross-cultural researchers and international service providers.”

#### Biography

It was 35 years ago that Gargi Roysircar started her work with people who are underserved and underutilize mental

health services. Since her recent retirement from Antioch University New England, she has been immersed crafting work ranging from a coauthored book on the American Psychological Association’s (APA) 2017 *Multicultural Guidelines* to her community-level practice and research among the poor in Haiti, Asian Indian immigrants in New England, and Central American asylee families camping in a South Texas border town. She hopes this transnational work will support psychology professionals for years to come.

As one might expect from someone interested in the well-being of immigrants and refugees, Gargi herself is a first-generation immigrant to the United States. Because she was raised and educated in India, her father’s position in the Indian government meant that her family moved between some of the country’s major cities. She received much of her high school education (Cambridge A level) in New Delhi and Bombay, her undergraduate degree (BA in English, BEd) in Madras, and her first master’s degree (MA in comparative literature) in Calcutta. Her education was heavily influenced by the British postcolonial system. To liberate herself from colonization, she took the opportunity as a young professional to teach in three different countries across three different continents: India, Nigeria, and the United States. Her education in her diverse home country and her international teaching gave her a deep appreciation for diaspora cultures.

In the 1970s, Gargi’s family made the move to the United States, settling in New England. Now, Gargi faced the challenge of being an immigrant in an adoptive country. But it was here that she found her focus in psychology. In a nation of immigrants, she wanted to understand how they coped with the same transition she had just undertaken. What were their support networks? How did they adjust to their second culture? What were their intersectional identities? What issues did their children face that the parents did not? These questions guided Gargi’s research for decades to come.

In the 1980s, Gargi began her doctoral work in educational and counseling psychology at Texas Tech University, where she examined her newfound interest in immigrant psychology intently. To enter her doctoral program, she composed a preliminary research paper on how to provide culturally competent mental health services to immigrants from India. Her doctoral clinical work was in university

counseling centers, where her supervisors gave her exposure to working with international students. Gargi developed workshops to educate her fellow immigrants and international students on mental health services available to them. Her doctoral dissertation was in that same area; she conceptualized an international student's mental health issues and used an experimental design of culturally consistent versus discrepant methods to counsel this student. After earning her doctorate in 1988, Gargi moved to an assistant professor position at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln (UN—L) in the counseling psychology program, where she honed her research focus and skills on measuring acculturation, acculturative stress, and ethnic identity of Asian and Latinx peoples and counseling ESL and children of war middle school students, as well as developing the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI), a self-report measure of multicultural counseling competencies. The MCI is the most frequently cited instrument (more than 800 times) among published multicultural competency scales. Her article (Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, Richardson, & Corey, 1998), which uses the MCI instrument, was ranked 13th over the past decades among 25 most cited articles of the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. Gargi was ranked in productivity ratings of authors in multicultural/cross-cultural journals. She served as the first Asian and woman editor of the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* as well as president of the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development. She was elected as an APA fellow in Divisions 17, 35, 45, 52, and 56. From Division 35 she received the Strickland-Daniel Mentoring Award and the Psychotherapy With Women Research Award.

Gargi remained at UN—L until the year 2000, having attained tenure and promotion, when opportunity and the desire to work closer to her New England—based family brought her to Antioch University New England (AUNE) as full professor in the Clinical Psychology Department. Gargi arrived at AUNE as the new millennium began, and her primary concern was the establishment of a new organization to continue her work with immigrants and international communities. The resulting Multicultural Center for Research and Practice became the first university-based community outreach and research center in the nation that engaged in international work domestically and globally.

One of Gargi's longest running programs is her international Disaster Shakti team. Since 2005, Gargi has led teams of clinical psychology doctoral students into areas impacted by disasters to complete a kind of work often forgotten during relief efforts—mental health counseling. *Shakti* means “empowerment” in several Indian languages, a word that properly encompasses not only the work Gargi's students are doing but the impact they leave behind.

Their first trip was in 2005 to Tamil Nadu in Southern India to serve communities impacted by a tsunami. Prior to engaging with the community, Gargi and her students pre-

pared by considering the specific and unique needs of the people they were to be working with. For many of the students, this would be their first experience working with a Southern Indian community or a community recently hit by devastation. The team considered the people it was to work with: What were the values of their culture? The social classes? The languages? The religions? What kind of support networks did they already have? Additionally, a consideration of the resources available was important because the area had lost its infrastructure and resources after the tsunami hit.

With this planning and training, the team made its trip to Tamil Nadu and worked closely with the survivors. It led workshops with translators to assist clients and the greater community with understanding their own resilience. Through careful monitoring and culturally sensitive methods, the responders gave the survivors tools and confidence to take care of their own well-being while they also restored their community. This trip became the model for many future trips and 30 future doctoral students. Disaster Shakti has taken student responders to Haiti in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, to Mexican communities impacted by flooding in 2008, to women and children affected by HIV/AIDS in South Africa and Botswana in 2007, and to U.S. communities hit by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

The group has continued its work in Haiti, setting up a mental health clinic in a primary care setting outside Port-au-Prince that students have returned to multiple times since the earthquake. The sheer poverty and long-term repercussions of the earthquake keep its intervention work necessary in the community. Student responders have led community classes explaining the effects of stress on health and provided outlets to help the community express their fears, hopes, and resilience. Now that Disaster Shakti has been working in the area for so long, they have become a part of the community. Gargi uses a culturally adapted measure she developed to analyze drawings that the children complete to illustrate their reactions to trauma. The research that Gargi and her team conduct and publish is reported back to the local Haitian community so that they can continue the work of recovery with a better understanding of what is happening with their neighbors and family.

Although engaging with communities impacted by trauma has captured her research focus, Gargi finds time to work on mental health issues with local New England communities, particularly those affecting immigrants. Gargi is part of a cultural association in Boston focused on community outreach among the local parents who are foreign-born immigrants and their U.S.-born children. Since 2000, she has served as a mental health consultant to the community. In addition to joining in their events, she provides educational resources on how they may benefit from mental health services and collects data on the members. Some of her publications are born from data collected through this

partnership. Gargi is interested in U.S.-born, second-generation Asian Indian immigrants' occupational interests, their parents' influence on their development and well-being, and their mental health. Despite their high academic achievements, vocational aspirations, and ability to function from day to day, the immigrant children do not necessarily have good mental health. They report anxiety, depression, perfectionism, and self-stigma, an immigrant paradox borne out of living a diaspora life. The goal of Gargi's research is to figure out how to enable immigrant children and their families to access mental health services.

### Selected Bibliography

The references are under Gargi's different last names: Roysircar, Roysircar-Sodowsky, and Sodowsky. \* The asterisk indicates graduate student coauthors.

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