

appeasement but is directed at eliminating tangible sources of disadvantage that are all too pervasive in a hierarchical, divisive and highly unequal society. Deshpande firmly believes that awareness of caste is the only effective way of abolishing it and in making this assertion he is being critical of the 'caste-blindness' which, in his view, is characteristic of much of our public discourse.

It is for these and other related reasons that Deshpande has stood staunchly in favour of enumeration of caste in the census. In a seminal paper which he co-authored with Mary John he pleaded for the inclusion of caste enumeration in the 2011 census. At several places he has urged that the non-inclusion of caste in the census as well as its studied absence in the general discourse on socio-political issues has actually hindered efforts to annihilate caste. Further in his opinion it has resulted in the notion of caste being made almost solely applicable to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the OBCs while the upper castes can claim to feel liberated from its oppressive influence. To quote him: "Claims of being casteless are today unmistakable signs of an upper caste identity".

Given his scholarship as also social commitment it should come as no surprise that Deshpande has evinced active interest in policy issues. He is the author, along with a colleague (Geetika Bapna) of a report for the National Commission on Minorities in which, among

other points of interest, there is a strong argument in favour of extending the benefits of reservation to Dalit converts to Islam and Christianity.

Deshpande advised the NCERT on its textbooks and took a position on the cartoon controversy during which he spoke out against texts which will engage, offend and inspire none. He warns that we should safeguard future generations from the sanctimony in schooling which their predecessors were subjected to.

Deshpande is the author of a highly rated book titled: *Contemporary India: a sociological view*, co-editor of *Anthropology in the East*, apart from numerous papers in journals of high repute. He has also written on social science teaching in Hindi in addition to co-editing a volume on untouchability and another on equal access in Indian higher education.

In view of his contributions, only a part of which are highlighted above, an eminent jury comprising Professors U.Sankar, Utsa Patnaik and Javeed Alam has recommended him for the Malcolm Adiseshiah Award for Distinguished Contributions to Development Studies for 2012.



MALCOLM & ELIZABETH ADISESHIAH TRUST

No.103 (Old no.42-45), Luz Church Road,
Mylapore, Chennai – 600 004
Phone : 044-24986229 E-mail : meatrust@dataone.in



Prof. Satish Deshpande

Professor, Department of Sociology
Delhi School of Economics
University of Delhi

A Profile

A Profile

Satish Deshpande, this year's recipient of the Malcolm Adiseshiah Award, is a sociologist of distinction. His work, prodigious by the most rigorous standards, is testimony to an acutely active research mind and reflects a personality constantly engaged in responding to the major issues and questions that colour our social and political landscape. Such a pursuit requires not only intellectual ability of a high order but also a commitment to establishing a better and improved society. What distinguishes Deshpande's work is his blend of philosophic inquiry with a willingness to engage in debate with peers and policy makers alike.

Educated at St. Stephen's College and JNU from where he graduated with his honours and master's degrees in economics and California State University, Santa Cruz where he obtained a master's and his doctorate in sociology Satish Deshpande entered the academic world, an appropriate niche for one of his bent of mind. He worked, prior to his doctoral studies as a full time community worker in a rural development organisation in Tilonia, Rajasthan and taught economics at his alma mater St. Stephen's. His subsequent academic appointments were in the

University of California at Santa Cruz, Institute of Economic Growth, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies Delhi, and the Delhi School of Economics where presently he is professor of sociology. He also taught sociology for a few years at the University of Hyderabad.

Satish Deshpande's principal areas of academic inquiry are caste and class inequalities, contemporary social theory, history of social sciences and south-south interactions. Possibly the most cited of his contributions relate to the sphere of caste and its varied implications for the country and society, and for development as a whole. A major motivation for this strong accent on caste flows from his conviction that although it is an 'ancient, complex and adaptable institution that continually discovers new sources of sustenance' we still insist on treating it as an 'embarrassing disease' and wish not to articulate its presence. Also, as he puts it succinctly, we take shelter under the belief that poverty is ubiquitously present amidst us, but caste has been solved permanently by Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Constitution. As a logical corollary to this Deshpande has consistently bemoaned the absence of data relating to caste in the official data sources, primarily the Census. In his considered view this refusal to collect data on the Other Backward Classes or OBCs is part of the 'Nehruvian' naiveté which hoped and perhaps, therefore, believed that with independence and the attempted

modernisation of the country the antediluvian notion of caste would atrophy. In the political sphere Deshpande uses two colourful, indeed evocative terms, to describe the role of caste. He suggests that while 'lower caste politics' is noisy and direct, its upper caste variant is 'usually forced to be silent and devious'. Another significant formulation of his is that caste is in fact a crucial form of capital and that this is only partially captured by what has come into prominence in development literature as social capital.

Satish Deshpande, already an established scholar, virtually became a household name following the decision of the union government to introduce reservation of places in educational institutions for the Other Backward Classes. Against the backdrop of the turmoil that greeted this decision, especially in some parts of the country, Deshpande along with another Adiseshiah awardee, Yogendra Yadav (2008), came out with a formulation for the assessment of backwardness in which caste would be one among several components. Their model, it may be added that it is the subject of much discussion and even controversy, is evidence-based, attempts to address individual and group disadvantage (such as those emanating from caste, gender, religion, and rural/urban residence), as well as interaction effects and the degrees of disadvantage. A major point the authors make is that affirmative action is not, as is commonly and wrongly perceived,